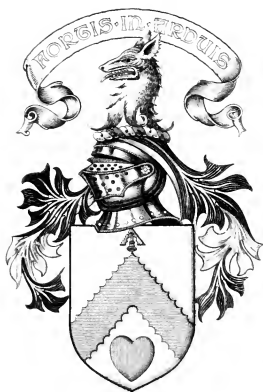


*W. H. Methven*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Lordy*

*Langston 1855*



JAMES NORMAN METHVEN





AN

# ESSAY

ON THE

AUTHENTICITY

OF

**Ossian's Poems,**

---

BY

**DONALD CAMPBELL,**

LIEUTENANT ON THE HALF-PAY OF THE 57TH REGIMENT.

---

*"Facts are chiels that winna ding  
And downa be disputed."*

BURNS.

---

A Y R:

PRINTED BY M'CORMICK & CARNIE.

1825.



The following Pamphlet was printed about three years ago ; but, through a variety of circumstances over which the Author had little or no controul, the due course of publication was interrupted or rather altogether prevented. On the suggestion of the Right Hon. Sir John Sinclair, it was sent to the late Mr. Constable of Edinburgh ; but, just at this period, the affairs of that Gentleman becoming embarrassed, his time and attention were taken up by more important matters, and, shortly after, his generally regretted death occurred and gave a temporary shock to all literary concerns. Hence, this Work received not, from Mr Constable, the attention it might have met with at a more propitious period ; and, when his affairs fell into the hands of a trustee, it was given back much in the same condition wherein it had been sent. A stray copy or two happened, however, to find their way into the hands of individuals, and this occasioned applications for more—first, to the Booksellers, who had none to give, and, then, to the Author himself—and that, too, by Gentlemen versant in the subject whereof the Work treats, and who, in terms which it is not for the Author to repeat, urge the propriety of giving it something like a chance of being made known to the public. He has, thus, been stimulated to persevere in the design of publication ; and the Tract, therefore, now appears in its original form, with the addition merely of this explanation.

NEWARK-CASTLE, }  
Dec., 1828. }





## TO THE READER.

WHEN perusing the various productions of the advocates for the authenticity of Ossian's Poems, it invariably struck me as unfortunate for the cause of genius and of truth, that, instead of employing a little industry on the collection of evidences by which their existence, previously to the translation, might be proved, their ingenuity and research had been chiefly directed to the apparently vain object of *replying* to the objections of their opponents, which rendered the controversy unconvincing and interminable. No opportunity of remedying this oversight, however, offered itself to me till a particular passage of an unpublished work suggested the idea of attaching some remarks to that effect; but, on entering a little into the subject, I found it impossible to render these any way convincing without exceeding the bounds of a note; and, as their publication in a separate form never occurred to me, an acquaintance with the Editor of the *Air Advertiser* occasioned their insertion in that paper. I had thus an opportunity of observing that they appeared interesting to many of the friends of Gaelic literature, particularly to Sir John Sinclair, whose zeal in regard to every thing honorable and beneficial to his country, and, consequently, in the cause of Ossian, requires no comment. He recommended their publication as a pamphlet under the auspices of the Highland Societies of London and of Edinburgh, and they have, therefore, been carefully revised, and will now, I trust, be found not unworthy the perusal of those who feel interested in the result of an inquiry that has long and deservedly engaged the attention of the literary world.

DONALD CAMPBELL.

NEWARK CASTLE, Ayr. }  
26th April, 1825. }





## ERRATA.

Page 21, lines 12 and 13. *For* "the occupation of Glencoe and Glenetive by Claniain of Braelochaber," *read* "the occupation of Glencoe and Glenetive by Claniain, of Braelochaber by, &c."

Page 39. Third line of the Latin quotation,—*for* "262" *read* "462."

Page 43. Second Gaelic quotation—line 2d,—*for* "eibbinn" *read* "eibhinn." 3d line,—*for* "Bar" *read* "Blar." 4th do.—*for* "ratneute," *read* "ratreute."

## Essay, &c.

---

### ANSWER TO DR. JOHNSON'S FIRST OBJECTION TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF OSSIAN'S POEMS.

**T**HOUGH the remains of the most powerful people existing in Europe before the universal ascendancy of the Romans had sunk the rest of the world into provincial insignificance, and preserved from intermingling with others by their inflexible spirit of freedom and impervious girdle of flood and mountain, the Gael were only known to their neighbours by that bravery which rendered them unconquerable in the field, and those civil commotions which rendered them almost ungovernable at home. Hence an inquiry into the traditional history and the manners and customs of that people promised to be peculiarly curious and interesting; and what could be better calculated to produce that result than a controversy, calmly and impartially pursued, regarding the authenticity of poems said to have been handed down among them, *by oral recitation*, for fourteen centuries? Had the Ossianic Controversy, therefore, been kept clear of the passions and prejudices of all who took a part in it, the result could not fail to prove highly interesting to the literary world. But scepticism and enthusiasm, from their very nature, could only be opposed to darken and confuse their subject, and to bury its every important feature beneath an incongruous mass of irrelevant matter. Thus the opponents of the authenticity of Ossian's poems closed up every avenue to the interesting inquiry, by assuming conjectures for facts, and substituting assertions for evidences—indicating, at the same time, it must be confessed, a determination not to be convinced in the imperious tone of certainty and decision with which these were delivered—while

its friends, with the exception of Sir John Sinclair alone, contented themselves with mere *replies*, without offering any direct evidence in its favor, or, at best, but offering that of *living* witnesses, which were but ill calculated to silence those who declared, from the first, that they believed every Scotsman capable of countenancing if not telling an untruth for the glory of his country\*. In attempting to remove the objections of the former, and in assisting the distinguished friend of Ossian, already named, in remedying the oversight of the latter, I shall keep as clear as possible of the mass of assertion and refutation already before the public. There is a general dislike to diving into the dry detail of controversial matter, and, hence, the public, without reading his advocates, avert their eyes from the stately stride of the blind and aged bard, to leer at the huddling gait of Johnson, or laugh at the hop-step-and-jump of the Great Unknown, as they sneeringly enter the lists and play at bo-peep around him. I shall, therefore, only notice here those two objections of Dr. Johnson, from which all that has been said against Ossian's poems seems to emanate, and then proceed to *prove* their authenticity on the evidence of a mass of witnesses *who lived before the days of Macpherson*.

The first objection assumes that the Gaelic language is unequal to the task of communicating the ideas ascribed to Ossian. "It is," says he, "the rude speech of a barbarous people, who, as they conceived grossly, were contented to be grossly understood."

To this objection it may be replied, *that these very poems, as published by Sir John Sinclair, for purity, perspicuity and*

---

\* Dr Johnson observes, that a Scotsman must be a sturdy moralist who loves not Scotland better than truth. Some of my countrymen have taken great offence at this, but I agree with him, and conceive that he has paid us, collectively, a high but justly merited compliment. The Scotsman who is a sturdy moralist loves Scotland next to truth, and the Scotsman who is *no moralist* loves her even better than truth. The remark, therefore, implies that every Scotsman, *moralist or no moralist*, loves his country; and as love of country is the soul of patriotism, this compliment, from the mouth of a man who loved not Scotsmen, is the highest ever paid to any race of people.

conciseness of language, are so far superior to Mr. Macpherson's, that no one capable of perusing them in the original can peruse them with pleasure in the translation. It may also be added, that the "*Prosnachadh Cathadh*" or war song composed by *Neil mor Mac Mhurich* (a specimen of which will be seen in Stewart's collection of Gaelic poems) at the battle of Harlaw, contains a stanza of ten or twelve lines for every letter in the Gaelic alphabet,—every word in every line, and almost in every stanza, beginning with the same letter, which indicates a copiousness of language that might, perhaps, be looked for in vain in the English. The fact is, that the Gaelic is of so expressive, so figurative a character, that we can hardly point our finger to a noun of it by accident which, analyzed, conveys not of itself a poetic idea. Let us take for example *iolair* and *Bein-neamhais*, i. e. 'the pilot of the sky,' which, however, is but a very unequal translation, (though I know not how to render it better,) and *the mountain next to heaven*, and we might as well call them the hen and the mole-hill as the *eagle* and *Bennevis*, yet we can scarcely point out two Gaelic words, conveying poetic ideas, that would not so suffer by a literal translation into English. Hence, in translating Gaelic poetry, much ingenuity and circumlocution will be found necessary; and he who could preserve the fire, force, simplicity and pathos of Ossian's poems in a translation, would, therefore, require to be a greater poet than Ossian himself. Though we cannot help admiring the manner in which Mr. Macpherson has translated some of those expressions peculiar to the Gaelic, we must, therefore, still term his work equally defective and inaccurate. The peculiarity of its idiom renders the charge of imposture, brought against the translator of Ossian, doubly ridiculous in the eyes of those who understand Gaelic. The fact is, that it would be almost impossible to write a page of English poetry in the name of a Gaelic translation, without using some expression foreign to its genius, and being, thus, exposed to detection. For instance, when the Author of Waverley, in his imitation of Gaelic poetry, (see the Legend of Montrose) calls the frost "the parent of ice,"—translate his poetic idea into Gaelic and you have an expression in this sense, foreign to its genius, and incapable of harmonizing with Gaelic poetry.

I wish not the reader to take my word for all this. A reading knowledge of the Gaelic language may easily be acquired, and the originals of Ossian's poems are now before the public. *But I am satisfied that he who will qualify himself to decide on what has been said, will agree with me, and no other can, with propriety, oppose, or even doubt it.* It may not be improper, however, to introduce here the following note from Dr. Smith, for the additional satisfaction of the reader.

“In a note to the translation of this passage,” says the Doctor, alluding to a part of the poem called Conn, “it was observed how easily the Gaelic language could accommodate itself to the nature of whatever subject it had to treat of, so as to make the sound generally convey an idea of the sense.—Some instances were also given of lines harsh or soft, rough or smooth, according to the nature of the subject described. It was particularly observed, that in this passage, which relates to a tender and mournful subject, the most prevailing sounds (ai, oi, uai, &c.) are such as may immediately inform the eye\* or

---

\* He who has perused the poems of Duncan Macintyre, the Glenorchy bard, will not question the accuracy of the above observation. He had certainly been born with all the inspiration of the poet of nature; but he could neither read nor write. Hence, if we find in his work the most elegant stile, the most harmonious numbers, we must ascribe it, chiefly, to the genius of the language in which he composed. And yet I can assure the reader that this is the case, and that he can hardly turn up a single page of his interesting volume of which the sound is not an echo to the sense. It is not, at present, within my reach; so that the following verse is derived from memory, and cannot be set down as a *chosen* example. I cannot, however, doubt that “the eye and the ear of even a stranger to the genius of the Gaelic language” may point out the lines of it which treat of different subjects:—

*Tha Ghaelich fuaim-fhaclach cruaidh sgartail,  
Dha 'n ard ghaisgach reachdar laidir;—  
Tha i cion gu cuisibh fialaidh,  
Chuir a guianh am briaraibh blathadh;  
Tha i corr a sgolta riasain,  
Chum sluagh gun chial a chiur samhach.*

TRANSLATION.

The Gaelic abounds with hard, sounding and vigorous words,  
To suit the strong, the proud, the lofty hero;  
It is mild to indicate the kindly feelings  
And warm intentions of the social heart;  
Superior in reasoning to silence,  
The frivolous, the flippant and the senseless.



the ear, of even a stranger to the language, what the poet treats of.

The Gaelic, being an original language, is, in a great measure, an imitation of nature. All its sounds, therefore, must be more an echo to the sense than those of any borrowed or artificial tongue. It is, however, more peculiarly adapted to descriptions of the soft, tender, plaintive, and elegiac kind—a circumstance to which may be owing, in some measure, the preservation of those ancient poems that fall under this character. But, when we say that this language is particularly adapted to the soft and tender, perhaps more so than any other language in the world, strangers to its structure and genius may suspect us of prejudice or partiality. They see its awkward appearance in a garb or characters not its own, and suppose, very naturally, that the letters which they look at, have the same sound and power as in other languages with which they are acquainted. Hence they immediately form erroneous conclusions unfavourable to the harmony of the language, as will appear from a single observation.

The Gaelic language consists of eighteen (originally sixteen) letters. Of these five are vowels; besides the letter *h*, which has somewhat of the power of a vowel, as well as aspiration. Such a proportion of vowels must be attended with a harmony and softness not to be found in other languages, in which the proportion of the vowels to the consonants is much less. It must likewise be observed, that of the twelve consonants of this language eight or nine, in most of the inflections, are altogether mute—the effect of the aspirate, so often annexed, being either to deprive them of their power, or to render that power more vocal, soft and mellow. This peculiar circumstance contributes so much to the *euphonia* or harmony of the language, that if it were written as it is sounded, when properly and gracefully pronounced, the number of its vowels would be found probably equal to that of the consonants which retain their power. And, to guard against the inconvenience that might arise from so great a proportion of vowels, this language has made admirable provision by a general law which seldom or never allows two vowels to be pronounced (unless in a diphthong) without interposing a consonant. There is invariably either an elision of one

of the vowels, or two or three auxiliary or servile letters provided for the purpose; one or other naturally steps in and fills the *hiatus*. But of the admirable and peculiar structure of this language we can give but a very inadequate idea in the bounds of a note. Few languages bear more evident marks of having been *cultivated* by *grammarians* and *philosophers*, although we know not at what period. *In this view alone an acquaintance with it would amply reward the labour of the student.* Connected as it is too with the learned languages, as well as the source of a considerable part of the modern tongues of Europe, the philologist would find the knowledge of it a very important acquisition. It would likewise lead to the pronunciation and meaning of innumerable vocables in the ancient languages, Hebrew as well as Greek and Latin. The following, which contains a just as well as an elegant and concise account of this language, will form a proper conclusion to the preceding remarks :—

*“Lingua Hibernica adeo copiosa est, ut gravitate Hispanicum, comitate Italicam, amoris conciliatione Gallicam, terroris incussione Germanicam, si non æquit, modico sane intervallo sequatur. Sacer orator, Hibernicæ linguæ fulmine sceleratos a flagitio sæpissime deterret, ejusdem quoque linguæ lenicinis, a flagitio ad virtutem attrahit. Linguam Hibernicam multu concinnitate prædictam esse quis neget? cum eam Stanihurstus ipse fateatur, acutam, sentiis abundantem, ad acria apophthemata et jucundas allusiones accommodatum esse.—Cambren. evers. p. 16.”*

In the same spirit in which the Doctor declared a language rude and defective of which he understood not one syllable—not even so much as the sound of its letters!—he declared that the Scotch were barbarous though he was totally ignorant of their manners and customs. Rude and barbarous, as here applied, of course, means a savage state. Did it mean the absence of learning, it could not be applied to the Scots in particular, for all the nations of Europe, in those ages which preceded the Reformation, were, in that respect, pretty much alike. But, indeed, these terms can in no sense apply to the absence of learning, for we have all seen men having no pretensions to the name learned, who have not (to say the least of it) been surpassed by the most learned of our acquaintances in amiableness of

disposition, sensibility of heart, and elegance of manners. Indeed, a convincing proof of this remark may be drawn from the indisputable fact, that the least learned of the sexes is the most refined. The Doctor, therefore, meant rude and barbarous in the most uncivilised sense, and, in doing so, he suffered his prejudices to lead him into a conclusion inconsistent with his great talents and that which, in any other case, he would have derived from his actual knowledge. It is well known that the Scots lived under a regular representative government for many ages—that, during these, they maintained a respectable place (in a political sense of the word) among the nations of Europe, and have been the most distinguished people in the world for that patriotism, wisdom and bravery, by which the independence of a small state is maintained against the most desperate efforts and the most fearful odds. All must admit this, and all who do so admit the most direct and conclusive refutation of the charge of barbarity as applied by Dr. Johnson—such conduct being totally at variance with the characteristics of a barbarous race. Nay, this is not all, for it is universally admitted, that, when the rest of Europe lay buried in ignorance and barbarity, learning found a safe asylum under the protection of the Kings of Scotland in the Island of Iona\*, whence, *as Dr. Johnson himself declares*, “savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge and the blessings of religion.” Scotland could not fail to derive the *benefits of knowledge*, as the Doctor very justly remarks, from the labours of men who essentially

---

\* “A detailed account of the origin and progress of the College of Iona,” observes Sir John Sinclair, “and of the numerous monasteries and seminaries of learning derived from it, is a great desideratum in Scottish literature.” “It would probably appear, from that inquiry,” he continues, “that many of the most celebrated Universities on the Continent, and consequently the revival of learning in modern Europe, originated with the natives of Scotland.” Sir John, after giving a long list of authorities that might be consulted on this subject, makes mention of Bleau’s Atlas, where there are accounts of the exertions made by the Scots in converting Bavaria, Switzerland, Franconia, Friesland, Hesse, Westphalia, Saxony and Austria, to the christian faith. As the evidence rests more on foreign than domestic authority, he concludes, “it would be less liable to cavil.”—*General View of the Hist. of Scotland by Sir John Sinclair.*

contributed to, if they did not actually cause, the revival of learning in the West of Europe.

“Hence, it was,” says Sir John Sinclair, “that the Monks of that sequestered spot shed a lustre on the nation to which they belonged, and were received and honored abroad as men of extraordinary erudition and piety. They essentially contributed to the establishment of several Universities on the Continent, *particularly that of Paris*; on which account the Scots enjoyed peculiar privileges there; greater than those of any other nation, or even than the natives of Picardy and Normandy, though feudal subjects of the French monarchy. By their exertions, upwards of twenty religious houses in Germany, twelve in Lorrain, and a great number in the Low Countries, were erected. From their diligence, these Monks were compared to a *hive of bees*; and, from their successful labours, to a *spreading flood*; while of both erudition and piety they seem to have possessed a greater share, and to have done more for their revival when at the lowest ebb, than any other society or body of men in Europe.”\*

Thence, like the beautiful star that, moving from the east, marshalled wisdom to piety in the days of old, learning travelled from Scotland to enlighten and guide to knowledge the darker course of the nations of Europe. Full of this glowing conviction, Dr. Johnson, for once, suffered the better part of his nature to overcome those feelings of prejudice which ought never to have belonged to a man of such learning and genius, and exclaims with enthusiasm, “that man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force on the plains of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona.” Who, then, will doubt that the College of Iona had employed itself with equal diligence and *success* in enlightening their own countrymen? This cannot be doubted, and those who assert the barbarity of the Scots must, *therefore*, show by what revolution of intellect and disposition they became afterwards rude and barbarous? Indeed, we have no evidence that the Scots were rude and barbarous, in the sense in which the Doctor speaks, at the period of St. Columba’s arrival. The

---

\* Heron’s Hist. of Scotland, and Dr. Smith’s Life of St. Columba.

most holy have their own weaknesses, and churchmen might think that they were giving the most efficacious recommendation to their principles by exaggerating the state of sin and barbarity from which their labours had converted mankind. In those times, emphatically termed the dark ages, churchmen may be said to have been the only writers, and scarcely one of these can be named whose work does not indicate that superstitious tone of mind the chief food of which is the miraculous, and, *consequently*, the *exaggerating*. Whatever weight may be allowed to this remark, it must be granted that Scotland gave birth to a Saint Patrick before she had been *enlightened* by a Saint Columba, and that *the result* of her contact with the generalship, discipline and bravery of a Roman army, proves that she had not been, even *at the æra ascribed to Ossian*, in a state of barbarity. And here it may also be premised, with some propriety, that even the account given by Roman authors of the nations whom they termed barbarous demands some allowances. The dress, manners and customs of people, who, in all these, strikingly differ from ourselves, at first sight produce a strong impression, and, such is the influence of national pride (of which the Romans possessed, perhaps, more than any other nation) that a contrast capable of being rendered favourable to ourselves is, on that account, always highly coloured. Considerations deduced from the result of the invasion of Scotland by the Romans are, therefore, the fairest by which we can form any estimate of the Scottish character at that period.

The Britons, though at one time governed by a race of Kings, in consequence of some Revolution or Rebellion to which history does not reach, had fallen into a state of anarchy, and were found by the Romans divided into factions under various chiefs. This is expressly stated by Tacitus in his Life of Julius Agricola, and to this state of things *alone* he ascribes the success of his countrymen over a race of people "warlike, independent, fierce and obstinate." And it were hazarding no erroneous conclusion, perhaps, to assert that it was the anarchy which thus prevailed among them that originally tempted the hopes of those rapacious invaders. At all events, his asserting that they had been at one

time governed by a race of Kings, and that to the Revolution or Rebellion which divided them into factions is to be ascribed the success of the Roman arms, establishes the important fact, that *a better state of Society than that described by their conquerors previously existed among the Britons.* But it appears to me that the Britons had not altogether, even by the time of the Roman invasion, receded into that state, in Dr. Johnson's language, called barbarous. Property was respected, a standard of value fixed, and, consequently, trade, *nay foreign trade*, carried on among them. These facts are irreconcilable to a state of absolute barbarity, and yet it may be proved, by the result of their collision with the conquerors of the Britons, that the state of society in Scotland was far superior to that which prevailed among them.

When the Roman army advanced into Scotland they found a band of daring patriots united under the command of a wise, brave and eloquent general ready to oppose them. That this band and their general deserve the panegyric is evident from the speech put into his mouth, and to which their hearts are made to respond, by Tacitus. "We are," said Galgacus,\* "the noblest sons of Britain, placed in the last recesses of the island; in the very sanctuary of liberty. We have not so much as seen the melancholy regions where slavery has debased mankind. We have lived in freedom and our eyes have been unpolluted by the sight of ignoble bondage. Let us *seek* the enemy, and as we rush upon him, *remember the GLORY DELIVERED DOWN TO US BY OUR ANCESTORS*, and let each man think that on his sword depends the fate of his posterity." Those who wish to deny Scotland the honor of an age that gave birth to a Fingal and an Ossian, may say that this speech was never conceived or delivered by Galgacus—that it was not reported to

---

\* "The speech of Galgacus," it is observed by Murphy, "is reckoned the finest in history. Neither the Greek nor the Roman page has any thing to compare to it. The speech of Perus to Alexander, so much admired by critics, excellent as it is, shrinks and fades away before the Caledonian orator." In short it is worthy of the hero whose sentiments and whose deeds inspire the lays of Ossian; and it is more than probable that the Galgacus of Tacitus and the Fingal of the Celtic bard are the same. (*See a subsequent page of this Essay.*)

nor taken down *verbatim* by Tacitus, but rather imagined by his genius and conveyed to posterity not in the veracity of the historian but in the romantic spirit of the novelist. We shall grant all this, but it must still be admitted, that it were totally inconsistent with the elegant genius and chaste taste of Tacitus to make a tattooed, nose-ringed, naked Hottentot of a chief expatiate, in a stream of eloquence which has never been surpassed, on the sacred beauty of freedom, the anathematised deformity of slavery, and to conjure a band of untamed barbarians, rude of intellect and savage of mind, by *THE GLORY OF THEIR ANCESTORS to protect their country and to vindicate its rights*. To clothe a burlesque such as this in the sober garb of historic truth might ennoble the genius of a Hudibras, but it could not fail to degrade that of a Tacitus and to render his name and his work a laughing-stock to the age in which he lived. Whether we believe, therefore, this speech was composed by Tacitus or delivered by Galgacus, we must still grant that it must have been *consistent* with the *circumstances and characters* of the Caledonian general and his army. And it is clearly consistent with the character of Fingal and the Fingalians as these are described by Ossian. This conclusion, as already observed, derives a convincing evidence from the result of their collision with the Romans. The Romans invaded South and North Britain under very different circumstances. In the expedition against South Britain they had to surmount at once the difficulties of a sea voyage and to effect a landing, at a period too when these, from the defective state of navigation, must have been peculiarly arduous. To North Britain they advanced step by step, according to the progress of their knowledge of the country, and the increase of their means to insure its conquest. In the former they succeeded in the face of all these difficulties; in the latter they were defeated in despite of that knowledge, their renowned generalship and discipline, and all the acquisition of strength and means derived from the possession and the resources of the half of Great Britain. This speaks volumes. It proves that the state of society among the Gael of Scotland, at the time of the Roman invasion, was far superior to that prevailing among the Britons, (which, from the facts noticed, cannot have been absolutely barbarous)—that deeds must have been achieved during that struggle worthy of the wisest general and

the most magnanimous band of patriots—and, in short, at once worthy the arm of Fingal and the lays of Ossian.

It must, however, be allowed that the battles and *forays* or *cattle-lifting* of the Gael among themselves, were calculated to produce an impression, such as that cherished by Dr. Johnson, on the minds of those who derive their ideas of the character of a people from their civil wars ; but nothing can be less just than this. The wars and battles of any race of people, considered abstractedly, are incapable of throwing any light on their domestic character, and this may be more particularly said of civil wars, where so many passions are brought into play as, for the time, completely change the national character. The reason is obvious. Aggressions which may have for their object the conquest of a kingdom are met by the hired mercenary or the patriot alone. The former brings no feelings to the struggle, or merely such as belong to his military character ; the latter is actuated alone by those calculated to do honor to his country. But those aggressions which may have for their object the subversion of a particular class of men or a particular set of opinions bear with them the air or the reality of persecution, and must ever produce enmity and hate. The truth of this remark might be proved by a reference to the conduct of every people in their civil wars ; and hence, if the Gael have ever been distinguished for barbarity in their wars at home, they are exculpated from the charge it infers by the fact that they have ever been distinguished for magnanimity in their wars abroad. Perhaps it may be insisted here, that the wars of the Gael among themselves were but the mere ebullitions of passion on the part of a rude and barbarous race, and not the result of attachment to any set of opinions, or of adherence to any particular party in a state ; and it must be owned that, to prove the erroneousness of this supposition, recourse must be had, chiefly, to Highland tradition. But, when history is silent on the origin of particular events, and tradition can account for them in a plain, probable and convincing manner, they are sceptics indeed who must shut their ears on important facts merely because some individual had not committed the thing to writing in a previous age.



After the seat of sovereignty had been removed to the South of Scotland, the Lords of the Isles, too powerful for subjects, aspired to regal sway; and, though often obliged to submit, in their hearts they seem never to have relinquished that idea. They lived in continual hostility to the King and his adherents, and so successful do they seem to have been in the struggle for power, that Jain Lom, the Braelochaber bard,\* asserts that they, at one time, possessed more than the half of Albyn. On the North of the Great Glen of Scotland, or the line of the Caledonian Canal, all were under their power; and that they possessed considerable influence to the South of that, is evident from the occupation of Glencoe and Glenetive by Claniain of Braelochaber, by the Keppoch family, and of many parts of Perthshire by the Macnabs and others who owned their vassalage†. The Murrays of Athole, and the Gordons of Strathspey, or Badenoch, are said, by Jain Lom and others, to have received their land from them, and to have been in alliance with them; and it is well known that almost all the possessions of the Campbells have been gradually wrested from them. If a line be drawn to the south of these properties, and all on the north of it considered under the sway of the Macdonalds, the assertion of the bards and seanachies, that they possessed more than the half of Albyn, does not seem much exaggerated. To form an idea of the effects of the gradual increase and decrease of the Macdonald power, it must be recollected that the King of Scotland, though equally despotic in his own department, possessed less actual power than any of the greater Chiefs. He had neither a standing army to obey his nod, nor a band of

---

\* He lived in the sixteenth century, and was Poet Laureate to King James the Second.

† The *Macduals* or Macdowals of Galloway and the Macdugalls (also pronounced *Macdual* in Gaelic) of Lorn are of the same stem with the Macdonalds of the Isles; and, as frequent mention is made in the History of Scotland of the descents of the Macdonalds into that district, it seems more than probable that they had been established there by the Chief of that Clan in the day of his power. Hence the bards may have assumed that his influence extended over the Western Coast of Scotland to the extremity of Galloway. JAIN LOM describes the boundary of the Macdonald kingdom; but the names of the places mentioned by him cannot now, I fear, be identified.

desperate vassals who owned him as their head ; and, hence, his authority, and sometimes even his existence, depended on the dexterity with which he maintained the balance of power among his despotic subjects, by leaguings with one party against the other. This was the only manner in which he could check or put down rebellion, and this, in most instances, could only be done by tempting cupidity. The prerogative of confirming to the victors the possessions of the vanquished, seems, therefore, to have constituted the very foundation of kingly power in Scotland. This is the principle on which the Macgregors were hunted through the woods, and their possessions divided among the degraded instruments of that inhuman persecution ; and this the principle on which the Highlands and Lowlands seem to have been at first placed in hostility to one another, as adherents of the more powerful Macdonalds, and of their deserted sovereign. The inveteracy of feeling to which hostility on this principle was calculated to give rise is beautifully portrayed by Sir Walter Scott in “ The Macgregor Gathering ;” and its extent, at one period, must have included all the adherents of Government and of the Macdonalds. Hence Highland and Lowland hostility. The history of Scotland makes frequent mention of the aggressions of the Macdonalds, and the criminal records of their country still more frequently ; but to give an idea of their power, the number of their vassals and allies, and the extent of the combination of Chiefs formed against them, is chiefly left to tradition. The list of these would occupy pages, but the following translation of verses by Jain Lom, addressed to Sir Alexander Macdonald and the Captain of Clanronald, may tend to give an idea of the Macdonald party in a concise and expressive manner :—

“ Race of the boldest warriors earth has seen,  
That on red Harlaw’s plain have victors been,  
That won on many a field a deathless name,  
And once rul’d Albion’s half with power and fame,  
Full many a Chief has own’d your stern command,  
And from your thoughtless bounty gained his land  
Of these Mackenzie, Rose, Munro, Mackay,  
Maclean of Dreolan, Gordon\* proud and high.”

---

\* The Duke of Gordon in the original.

This list, as already observed, might be greatly extended from other authorities. Now, when it is considered that the only manner in which hostility could be carried on by undisciplined and unsupplied vassals was by abrupt incursions in which they would be obliged to support themselves on the spoils of the enemy, that this circumstance and the inaccessible state of the Highlands before roads were made, heaths burned, and forests cleared away, forbade a decisive blow and exposed the aggressors to similar treatment in their turn, we may easily see what gave rise to the civil wars and *cattle-liftings* \* of the Gael. To *lift* cattle was therefore to take them away openly and by force from any party openly at enmity or in alliance with the open enemy of those who did so. To *steal* cattle was to take them away by night from all parties indiscriminately. In short, cattle-lifters may be compared to the plunder-sustained armies of Buonaparte; cattle-stealers to common thieves and housebreakers. Cattle-stealing, in the Highlands, was, therefore, confined to the bands of outlaws, who went under the general name of warriors of the woods; cattle-lifting to the regular clans, who took that method of punishing their enemies, or those who, violating previous engagements, allied themselves to them. To judge of their character from this conduct, without bearing in mind that the different parties practising this mode of warfare considered themselves as subjects or vassals of separate and independent princes, is to draw erroneous conclusions. Hence, the solution of well-attested facts so contradictory in their nature as to appear irreconcilable, viz. that the Highlanders, generally speaking, were ever at war with the Government and laws of their country and all those who adhered to and obeyed them,

---

\* Among the few instances in which the Author of Waverley has manifested a want of correct information regarding the Highland character, may be named that passage in which he causes EVAN DU to describe to the SASSANACH the difference between *cattle-lifting* and *cattle-stealing*. That in which he has caused him to term the body-guard of a Chief his tail, is another ridiculous error. The body-guard of a Chief is, in Gaelic, called "*Leine-chrios*," i. e. his "shirt of mail." The resemblance between the two sounds, in the English of *Evan du*, might, perhaps, have misled the Saxon's ear.

and yet very different, in their private character, from the inferences generally drawn from these facts by those who are ignorant of Highland tradition, which has preserved anecdotes that clearly and faithfully pourtray the character and the manners of the Gael. Those familiar with this lore, on the contrary, must conclude, that the Highlanders, if wild, were yet faithful in love ; passionate, yet firm in friendship ; proud, yet social in their habits ; fierce, yet hospitable to strangers ; warlike, yet kindly in their feeling ; rude, yet lovers of song ; illiterate, yet poetic in their ideas.

The only objection to this definition of the origin of the battles and forays or CATTLE-LIFTING of the Gael, will be found in the imaginations of those who suppose that Highlanders and Lowlanders are different races of people. But a supposition such as this appears to me of all others the most groundless and visionary. The Lowlanders, supposing them a different race of people from the Highlanders, cannot have established themselves in Scotland by conquest, or they would not submit to the king and the laws of that realm ; and had they been banished from any other country and arrived as supplicants to seek an asylum there, their *reception and establishment in the Lowlands could not be unknown to history or tradition even in the rudest ages*. The cause of the difference between Highlanders and Lowlanders must, therefore, be traced to a different source.

The intercourse between the inhabitants of the South of Scotland and their neighbours in England, in times of peace, is known to have been of the most intimate character. Crowds of people from the one country, doubtless for the purpose of traffic, attended the neighbouring fairs in the other ; and, though national prejudices might retard the imitation, every discovery in the arts of civilized life, and every step toward a more enlightened age, would naturally, nay inevitably, produce on the part of the Scots a gradual knowledge of the language, and a gradual approximation to the customs and manners of the English, particularly as the latter took the lead in that commercial intercourse with other nations, which chiefly hastened our advance to a better and more refined stage of society. This knowledge and approximation would naturally be encouraged

by the Court, which would find it politic to wean the people, in this manner, from the sway of the Macdonalds and the other Chiefs who inhabited the hills, owning no law or authority but their own will, imitating and admiring nothing but the wild, independent habits of their ancestors, and friendly only to their country in the hour of invasion, from the inflexible character of their national pride, their uncontrollable spirit of freedom and unshrinking love of battle and renown.

Two objections only can be offered to this explanation of the causes by which Highlanders and Lowlanders were so long distinguished from one another,—namely, the difference between highland and lowland names, and between the broad Scotch and the English language. pe

As to the first objection, it seems easily removed, for, I think, there would be little difficulty in shewing that every name *peculiar* to the South of Scotland, may, like all Gaelic names, be traced to some descriptive Celtic word or words. I shall assume the two names which seem to me, of all others, the most congenial to the pronunciation and genius of the broad Scotch, and which all might think peculiar to the part of the country in which it is spoken, namely *Mucklewham* and *Muckleraith*. No one can attach any meaning to these names as here written, or trace them, naturally and easily, to any compound of two broad Scotch words. Hence they cannot be ascribed to that dialect; but each of them may be naturally and easily traced to two descriptive Gaelic words, the abbreviation of which (and from which they can scarcely be said to differ) furnish two Highland names, viz. *Macilraith* and *Macilchaim*—the son of the swarthy lad, and the son of the one-eyed lad. And, as to the difference between the broad Scotch and the English language, it may easily be conceived, that the assumption of the latter by a people who originally spoke\* Gaelic, was highly calculated to produce

---

\* Though the Gaelic language can naturally and beautifully convey all ideas connected with the passions, and a hunting, herding, warrior life, no terms belonging to a more advanced stage of society, not even those of the multiplication table, can be rendered intelligible in it without doing violence to

a peculiar provincialism by their intermingling it with some congenial expressions in their native tongue, and reconciling it, in a certain degree, to the mode of pronunciation and intonation with which they had been accustomed. Their own names, in particular, would still be preserved, and these would gradually undergo such a change as a tongue trained to a different language would find it more easy to pronounce. For instance, no Englishman can pronounce Macilchaim like a Highlander without some difficulty. To pronounce it with ease, he will find himself compelled to alter it a little, and a change more easy, simple and congenial to the spirit of the broad Scotch than it has undergone, in rendering it Mucklewham, cannot be conceived. It appears to me, theratire, very unreasonable to assume, from the names and language of the Lowlanders, that they are a different race of people from the Gael. Indeed, the more we reflect, or enter into an investigation of that difference, the more we shall feel convinced that they are descended from the same ancestry. The dress of the Lowlanders, on which another objection to this conclusion might perhaps be founded, on examination will furnish an additional proof of the correctness of this view of the subject.

Than the Highland dress none can be less calculated for the comfort of artisans and husbandmen. The kilt and the plaid

its spirit and harmony. Hence the Lowlanders, who, in advancing from that simplicity of life, preceded the Highlanders and followed the English, would be obliged to change the entire structure of their own language, to assume another, or to invent a new; and, as their knowledge of that of their neighbours would increase in proportion to their intercourse with that people, and their progress in the arts and sciences, and it is much more easy to learn a name, or rather (in the sense in which we now write) to retain it, than to invent one, nothing can be more clear than that they should find it equally convenient and absolutely necessary to naturalize a language of which their peculiar situation gave them a gradual knowledge. The prevailing guttural sounds and the number of Gaelic words intermingled with their language, also shew that the Lowlanders originally spoke Gaelic, while the fact that the Highlanders of the present day cannot transact the ordinary affairs of life without using English expressions, proves the necessity of introducing so extensive a change.

are quite unfit for labour, and, hence, as men began to cultivate the soil more extensively, and to form themselves into the various classes necessary to carry on the arts of a more civilized life, they were gradually relinquished in the Lowlands and Highlands. The progressive manner in which this seems to have been done offers another argument in favour of their Celtic descent. Still partial to the display of a good leg, though the kilt was laid aside and the small clothes assumed in its stead, the hose and the garters were preserved; the bonnet was then gradually enlarged, and the short jacket modelled into a more commodious shape, but strong Celtic prejudices long preserved this dress as still indicating a clear affinity to the garb of their ancestors. At this moment the peasantry of Strathspey and other places along the East coast of Scotland wear the old Lowland dress as here described. It was only when the chain of prejudice greatly relaxed its grasp, and the hearts of men found themselves free to follow an agreeable or laudable example, that the dress of the Lowlanders entirely lost its native Celtic character.

Another convincing argument in favour of this hypothesis may be drawn from the names by which these sons of the vale and the mountain have always been called in their own country. The names by which they have ever been distinguished from one another, in either language, are Gael and Gall, Highlander and Lowlander, which would not be the case could the latter be called by any name that could shew them a different race of people. Every person who knows the height to which their prejudices against one another at one time reached, will feel satisfied that the one party would not be less willing to claim any name that should prove a different descent than the other to taunt them with it, were such a thing possible. I cannot, at this moment, attach a confident meaning to the word \* Gall;

---

\* Some Gaelic scholars seem inclined to believe that Gall meant foreigner; but for this they can give no good reasons or shew any good authority. The word was never used in that sense. An inhabitant of the Lowlands of Scotland, and no other, is at this moment understood in the Highlands by the word

but I feel satisfied, that it originated as a mere nick-name ; and I am prepared to shew that it cannot be assumed as the name of any foreign or distinct race of people on any principle consistent with the genius of the Gaelic language. The Gaelic derives the names of the different races of people from the names of their countries, on the same principle with the English. From *Fraing* (France) we say *Frangach* ; from *Ediallt* (Italy) we say *Eedailteach* ; from *Gearmailt* (Germany) we say *Gearmailteach* ; from *Lochlan* (Lochlin) *Lochlanach* ; from *Sassan* (England) *Sassanach*, &c. &c. In short, there can be no race of people, known by any other name in any other language, that could be called Gall, in the Gaelic, consistently with its genius and spirit, and this is, of itself, a sufficient proof that they are of the same descent, independently of the other convincing reasons already mentioned as bearing on that point.

But that the Gael were not involved for ages in that state of rudeness and barbarity which the Doctor imagined, might be proved from sources which could not fail to produce conviction in every impartial mind. Poetry in the Highlands consisted of the spontaneous effusions of native genius. A learned bard (if we except Alexander Macdonald, who published a volume of Gaelic songs in the year 1760) was unknown there. Hence, in the productions on various subjects of various individuals living in different parts of the country, and distinguished from those by whom they were surrounded by nothing but the talent of being able to communicate their sentiments in measured language, must be faithfully portrayed the thoughts and feelings of those individuals, and, consequently, as these are a

---

Gall ; and they cannot shew one instance in which it has been applied in any other sense by the bards or seanchies. The words used by Ossian, and later bards, for foreigners and strangers, are *daimh* and *coigrich*, and no instance can be shewn in which the Lowlanders were called by either of these, or any other name save Gall, by the Gael. Sir Walter Scott is quite in error in causing Roderick *du* and the Minstrel to call them Saxons in the *Lady of the Lake*. The Highlanders never called the Lowlanders "Saxons," nor any other name but Gall in Gaelic, and Lowlanders in English—a convincing proof of their being of the same descent, and only different through causes produced by their different local situations,



multitude in number and lived in different ages,\* the principal features of the national character. If the Gael were then rude and barbarous, these productions must indicate their rudeness and barbarity; and, if the contrary, they must also contain a proof of that fact. That they do is evident to every individual who can peruse them in the original, and it might be rendered so to others by an able translator. To give many specimens here would swell this Essay beyond the bounds of a pamphlet. But I can assure the readers that no subject can be named on which I cannot produce extracts which might bring as conclusive evidence of that fact as the following.

This poem is, in Gaelic, called the ‘Aged Bard’s Desire.’ The era of its author is unknown; but it will be found, with a translation by Alexander Macdonald, already alluded to, in a collection by his son Ronald du. His translation is literal, but as it is my object to give the reader an idea of the *beauty* of the original, I have assumed the stile and measure which appears to me best calculated to effect this object. I think I may venture to assert that the ideas are here faithfully preserved, though I am, at the same time, sensible that the beautiful simplicity with which they are delivered is, in a great measure, if not completely, lost.

Lay me by the streams that slowly flow,  
 With mild, meandering steps along the glen;  
 My head beneath the fragrant shade laid low,  
 Whilst thou, O sun, look’st kindly o’er the plain.

Soft on a bank of daisies stretch my side,  
 Where zephyr sweetly breathes and kindly plays;  
 My frail foot laving in the pleasing tide,  
 That gently murmurs as it mildly strays.

\* There are various Collections of Gaelic poems, perhaps not less than twenty volumes; and, when we consider that there are frequently not more than one song of a few verses and never more than three or four composed by one individual, we may form some idea of the number of those who composed in Gaelic.

Around my verdant bank, all bathed in dew,  
 Be the fair lilly's modest form display'd—  
 The pale, soft primrose of the loveliest hue—  
 The meadow-queen—in all their sweets array'd.

Around the lofty border of my glen,  
 Let bending boughs their blooming robe display;  
 And aged rocks send back with joy again,  
 The pleasing warbler's sweet mellifluous lay.

And, since mine eyes have fail'd, ye winds, O say,  
 Where do the frail—the mournful reeds reside—  
 Still wailing sad—while trout around them play,  
 Nor feel the gale that curls the genial tide.

Then, o'er the wood that crowns the mountain's brow,  
 Swan, from the land of waves, do thou arise,  
 Pouring thy tender tale of love and woe,  
 In melting music through the listening skies.

Then, through the ivied rocks of voice profound,  
 Let limpid springs with hollow murmurs break;  
 And ocean's waves of softly-saddening sound,  
 The thousand notes of tuneful echo wake.

Close by me, let the calves their vigour ply,  
 Sweep o'er the plain and by the streamlets bound;  
 And, tired of strife, the young kid guileless lie,  
 Where my fond arms may circle him around.

Then, as the voice of rocks and mountains wild,  
 To the gay heifer's\* joyous noise reply;  
 Pleased let me hear (by distance rendered mild)  
 The harmonious low on thousand pinions fly.

And, streaming softly on the plaintive gale,  
 Let the fold's gentle call attract mine ear,  
 The parent race return a welcome hail,  
 And, bounding down to meet their young, appear.

But turn, my soul! yon peerless fair behold,  
 Beneath the king of trees' delightful shade;  
 Her hand of snow, 'mid locks of flowing gold,  
 With harmony sustains her leaning head.

Her mild blue eyes, that softly, slowly move,  
 Fix'd on yon youth, who, breathing by her side,  
 The melting lay of fond and faithful love,  
 Dissolves her beating heart in music's tide.

The sound expires! and, lo, her bosom grows  
 In modest ardour to his faithful breast ;  
 Her lips, unsullied as the dewy rose,  
 In virgin love's pure zeal to his are prest.

Lo, as in triumph beamed from eye to eye,  
 Love lures their souls through his delightful maze ;  
 The very deer, while o'er the wilds they fly,  
 Fixed by the magic sight, inclining, gaze.

Eternal pleasure to the guileless pair,  
 That waked a joy which may no more be mine ;  
 And fare thee well, thou mildly-pleasing fair,  
 Whose heavy locks in graceful ringlets twine.

Now let the hunter's steps approach mine ear,  
 The noise of dogs, and darts that whiz along ;  
 That youth upon my cheek may re-appear,  
 And brace my nerves by conquering age unstrung.

The very marrow in my bones shall start,  
 When whistling arrows, dogs and bow-strings sound ;  
 And when they call " behold the fallen hart,"  
 My feet, like lightning, o'er the hills shall bound !

Then shall the faithful dog again appear,  
 Whose steps still followed wheresoe'er I moved ;  
 The hills we sought, their frowning rocks uprear,  
 The woods we hunted and the glens we loved.

The hospitable cave I shall behold,  
 That oft received us from the lowering night ;  
 Whose blazing faggots chased approaching cold,  
 Whose cups still raised our spirits to delight.

The branchy hart shall yield our smoking fare,  
 Trega our drink, our music its soft wave ;  
 And, should ghosts shriek and groaning mountains glare,  
 Peace, gentle peace, shall smile within our cave.

Now o'er the lofty borders of the glen,  
 The tall Scur-eilt its blooming groves uprears;  
 There first the thrush pours forth her lovely strain,  
 And gentle spring in flowery robe appears.

And, next it Gormal of the loveliest hue,  
 In towering ease, attracts my wandering sight;  
 Its thousand pines still pressing on the view,  
 Its roes that bound o'er meadows of delight.

The beauteous lake of woody isles I see,  
 Heaving young waves against its pebbly shore,  
 O'er which the forests wave tall, stately, free,  
 Mingl'd with rowan red or hawthorn hoar.

Chief of a thousand hills, do I behold  
 Thee Arden, in thy glorious hues array'd!  
 Thy locks have been the dream of stags from old,  
 The bed of clouds is still thy lofty head.

Vision of bliss, ah! fail'st thou on my view,  
 Return once more, a moment's space return!  
 It hears me not—hills of my soul adieu!  
 Lonely and dark the bard is left to mourn.

Farewell fond youth, and lovely maid farewell,  
 My eyes no more behold your love divine!  
 May summer's joys your ardent bosoms swell,  
 Though winter and its thousand woes are mine.

Bring forth my tuneful harp and flowing shell,  
 And be they placed all quietly by my side;  
 The shield that sav'd my sires through battle' swell,  
 And oft roll'd back the war's terrific tide.

Then on the harps of Ossian and of Daol,  
 Oh, let me hear a sadly pleasing sound,  
 As opening wide is seen their airy hall—  
 When evening comes the bard will not be found!

Had the Doctor perused the foregoing verses in the original, I believe he would feel convinced that they are not the "gross conception of a barbarian" nor communicated in a "rude" (and in so far as poetry is concerned) "defective language."

## ANSWER TO DR. JOHNSON'S SECOND OBJECTION.

Dr. Johnson next asserts that "few men have opportunities of hearing a composition often enough to learn it, or inclination to repeat it often enough to retain it, and that what is once forgot is lost for ever." In forming this objection the Doctor conceived and wrote as a man of letters, forgetting that the same rule cannot apply to his memory who has an opportunity of hearing one work only worthy of notice during his whole lifetime, and to his whose mind is eagerly extending its attention to all the literature of the whole world. But the remark is not only founded on a false basis but baffled in its conclusion by an intrinsic absurdity; for, in asserting that what might be *forgot* by one individual could not be *remembered* by any other, it assumes that unwritten poetry could only be handed from one generation to another through one single channel or along one chain of individuals; or, in other words, that only one man in every generation could learn it from the last, and communicate it to the next! In short, the Doctor, in imagining those objections, came to an erroneous conclusion by omitting to distinguish between the character and customs of the English with whom he was acquainted, and the Highlanders concerning whom he was reasoning. These, at the period to which his objections allude, were an idle race. Every family of them had its own small patch of corn and meadow-land, which, from the extent of the population, on a comparison with that of the arable land of their country, was so limited as to require for its cultivation and security not more than a fortnight's labour in spring and another in autumn. The rest of the year was dedicated to fishing and shooting, employments well calculated to give buoyancy to their spirits and a vigorous and romantic turn to their minds. Sprung from the same stem—united in enterprise—inseparable in their interests and apprehensions—every clan resembled a large and ardently attached family, no member of which indulged or felt a wish foreign to the horizon by which it

was surrounded. Their intercourse with one another, therefore, was of the most intimate and indissoluble character. Their hours of idleness, doubtless the greater part of their time, were naturally spent together. The inhabitants of every small village met each successive evening in *ceilidhean*, where the night was merrily spent in singing songs, rehearsing tales, playing games, and telling traditions; and, proud of their country, ancestry, and clan, to a degree that has always exposed the national character to satire and sarcasm, it will be readily granted that any thing calculated to gratify their love of either could not fail to find, in such assemblies, many equally ready to speak and to hear. Add to this the facilities Gaelic poetry affords to the memory, where one line so introduces another that it is impossible to remember the first and forget the next of a couplet, and it may be safely concluded that, once known, it is *impossible, during the continuance of that state of society*, that the poems of Ossian, in particular, could ever be *forgot* in the Highlands. Had the powerful mind of Dr. Johnson been shut out from all books, and so circumscribed in its mental exertions and enjoyments as to have been confined to the illiterate society of a narrow vale, in which, however, there might be one man that could rehearse “The Paradise Lost” as a tale, I have not the slightest doubt but he would soon visit that individual sufficiently often, and listen to him with sufficient eagerness, to learn it, and feel as much pleasure in rehearsing it again as should enable him to retain it; and why might there not be hundreds in the Highlands in every age since the days of Ossian, with natural powers of mind and love of song, similarly situated? The very state of barbarity, supposed by the opponents of the authenticity of Ossian’s poems, could only be favourable to their preservation by oral recitation, as the very ignorance which disposes the barbarian to wonder is calculated to impress indelibly on his mind the subject of his admiration. Much might be said to show that every circumstance calculated to preserve unchanged the national character since the days of Ossian, was only favourable to the preservation of these poems. Their love of poetry, ‘their opportunities to learn it, and their inclination to repeat it sufficiently often to retain it,’ can be proved by facts too stub-

born to be disputed, *viz.* the collection, from oral recitation, in the Highlands, of upwards of twenty volumes of Gaelic poetry, published within these sixty years ; and I am persuaded that rewarded industry might still collect as many more. I do not possess all these, but I can name a number of them, and have seen many others, the names of the compilers of which I do not, at this moment, recollect. There is Dr. Smith's collection of Ossianic poetry ; there is a collection derived, I believe, from the correspondence of the Highland Society. There is Alexander Macdonald and Ronald Macdonald's collections, Stewart's collection, Turner's collection, Macfarlane's collection, Maclean's collection, Macleod's collection, a collection by two Englishmen immediately after Dr. Johnson's Tour, which contains the original of Morduth translated by Mr. Clark and many beautiful fragments of ancient poetry \*. There is the MacCalman collection of Gaelic tales, composed chiefly by the succeeding bards, but, like most of the tales of the Highlands, having a reference to the achievements of the heroes of Ossian. And whoever chooses to apply to Alexander Gillies, tailor in Glengarry, Mary Macdonald of the same place, now I believe married in Braelochaber, Macfarquhair, Achintore, and old Donald Bane MacColl Durar, now Slate-Quarry, Glencoe, may get from them of unpublished tales, well worth publishing, another large volume. In addition to these, many volumes of Gaelic poems, numbers of which are well worth translating, have been published for individuals who can neither read nor write ; for example Duncan Macintyre, Allan Macdougall, MacGregor, and many others. Here we have an overwhelming mass of evidence *that hundreds in the Highlands had opportunities to learn, and inclination to repeat, as much poetry as may be contained in from twenty to thirty volumes.* These very volumes furnish abundant evidence that the poems of Ossian, and the achievements of the heroes they celebrate, were well known in the Highlands before the days of Mr. Macpherson ; and the following extracts prove that they were also known in Ireland and the South of Scotland before then.

---

\* A friend of mine informs me that he has very lately seen this book in the hands of Mr. James Munroe, Fort William.

EVIDENCES OF THE EXISTENCE OF OSSIAN'S POEMS PREVIOUSLY  
TO THE TRANSLATION BY MR. MACPHERSON.

Suhm, the Danish Historian, has actually ascertained, from northern authorities, the existence of Swaran the son of Starno—that he carried on many wars in Ireland—defeated most of the heroes who opposed him *except Cuchullin*, who, *assisted by the Gaelic or Caledonian King, Fingal*, in the present Scotland, not only defeated him but took him prisoner, and had the GENEROSITY to send him back again to his own country. The existence of Annir and Erragon, mentioned by Ossian, is also ascertained by the same author, and, *what is most remarkable*, the character given of these heroes by their own historian coincides exactly with that given of them by the Celtic poet.\* The following translation of a fragment of Ossianic poetry, relative to the wars of Swaran in Ireland and his conquest by Fingal, as above, furnishes another evidence of the authenticity of these poems. The original will be found in Stewart's collection of Gaelic poetry :—

'This night, O glen of Cona ! silence reigns  
In dreary darkness o'er thy mournful plains ;  
No watchful dog thy nightly wanderer chides,  
While to the social hall his challenge guides ;  
No tuneful harp, sweet-sounding in the gale,  
Proclaims in kindling notes the warrior tale.  
Ceas'd is the voice of song ! the screech-owl pours  
The voice of sorrow through the crumbling towers,  
While lonely, tearful here I'm left to mourn,  
Helpless yet hopeless of one friend's return !  
Poor, deaf and blind old man ! I feebly move  
A wounded elk through the deserted grove,—  
A sapless poplar bending, all declin'd !  
Leafless and trembling in the howling wind !

Not thus was Ossian's form and soul of fire,  
When Starno's son in blood suffused his ire ;—

---

\* For some interesting historical facts proving the correct idea given by Ossian of the manners and customs of these and other northern heroes, see Sir John Sinclair's Essay on the authenticity of Ossian's poems.



Well could his hand the dexterous war-blade wield,  
 Nor weak his arm to raise the sounding shield.  
 Not thus when round high Morven's mighty king,  
 The generous warriors formed a matchless ring,  
 When the hard contest of the spears was o'er,  
 And blazing oak illum'd green Erin's shore.  
 Then social shells and golden cups went round,  
 Till rising smiles were seen where rage had frowned.  
 And tuneful harps and tuneful voices vied,  
 Till joy and merriment chased ire and pride.

To Ullin, Carril, Ryno, Fingal said,  
 Sing, sing those lays that praise the mighty dead,  
 Who won hereditary fame, with bold  
 And generous actions, like their sires of old.  
 Lochlin's victorious king with pleasure hears  
 The tales of those who shone in other years ;  
 To Fingal's soul delightful are the strains,  
 That clothe their mighty deeds on bloody plains.

The mighty kings inclined the host among,  
 To list the tuneful harp and lofty song ;  
 A hundred harps with trembling strings obey  
 A hundred voices pour the lofty lay.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus passed the night in feast and song away,  
 'Till brightly shone the morning's lovely ray,  
 When, striding downward 'mid the horn's\* loud roar,  
 Wild Lochlin's warriors hurried to the shore.

Now stretching swiftly o'er the heaving sound,  
 Their stately galleys 'neath full canvas bound,  
 While roaring winds their tardy progress chide,  
 And ocean plays around with sportful pride.  
 Ye maids of Lochlin, o'er whose breasts of snow,  
 Soft, golden locks in graceful ringlets flow—  
 Who eye with ceaseless care the ocean's crest—  
 Behold they come ! lay, lay your fears to rest !  
 Where glowing ocean joins the purple sky,  
 Like graceful swans on liquid air, they ply.  
 My kindling heart anticipates the joys,  
 That swell your bosoms and that melt your eyes ;

---

\* The instrument here translated *horn* is called *stoc* in the original,

As all the soul holds dear are known afar,  
 Escaped from all the terrors of the war.  
 But, ah, I pity such as shed the tear,  
 For those than brothers good, than brothers dear—  
 The kind, the gay, the faithful and the mild,  
 Who ne'er may guide the sail o'er ocean wild !  
 For ye I feel who mourn for the brave,  
 That fill on Erin's fields a bloody grave.—  
 Their dogs that wander heedless of the hind  
 And bounding elk, bring sorrow to my mind.  
 How deeply mournful is their howl of woe,  
 As for their master's track they wander slow—  
 Their track whose polished arrows rust at home,  
 Though their pale ghosts on cloud-wrapt mountains roam !'

The following extract is from Giraldus, who wrote in the twelfth century :—' And they believe that the spirits of the dead pass into the company of the illustrious—as Fin MacChuil, Oskir MacOsshin, and the like, of whom they preserve tales and traditionary songs.'\*

John Barbour, who wrote the life of King Robert Bruce in the year 1375, compares his conduct at the battle of Dalri to that of Gaul the son of Morni; and this proves that his achievements were known and admired at that time, else it could not be thought a compliment to such a hero to be compared to him. The Lord of Lorn, enraged at the destruction of his men by the single arm of the King, observes—

' ———Methinks Martheake son,  
 Right as Gow-Mac-Morn was won,  
 To have from Fingal his menzie,  
 Right so from us all has he ;  
 He set ensample this him like,  
 The whilk he might more manner like.'

Hector Boethus, in his History of Scotland published in the year 1526, asserts that Finnanus the son of Coelus, commonly called Fyn MacCoul, is said, by *some*, to have lived in the days of Eugenius, the son of Fergus II., who died in the year

---

\* "*Defunctorum animus in consortium abire et estimant quorundam in illis locis illustrium, ut Fin MacChuil, Oskir Mac Osshin, et tales; de quibus fabulas et cantilenas retinent.*"

462—that, according to the *current tales*, “*more to be respected than the testimonies of the learned*,” he was a *hero*, distinguished in the art of hunting, and formidable to every one from his unusual size of body. \*

† Bishop Lesslie, in his History of Scotland, confirms the above. “It is the opinion of *many*,” he observes, “that Finnanus, the son of Coelus, in our language Fyn MacCoul, a man of huge size, and sprung, as it were, from the race of the ancient giants, at that time (the reign of Eugenius the II.) lived amongst us.”

The Highland Society possesses manuscripts, written before the days of Macpherson, containing two poems *expressly ascribed to Ossian*.

In one of the poems published in Allan Ramsay’s Ever-Green, collected by Mr. Bannatyne in the year 1568, the stature and prowess of Gaul are also alluded to—

“My fader meikle Gow-Mac-Morne,  
That from his midder’s wame was shorne,  
For littleness was so forlorne,  
Sican a Kemp to bear.”

In allusion to Fingal’s rencontre with the Spirit of Loda, we find the following lines in the same poem—

† “My fore-sire heicht Fyn Mac-Coul,  
Quha dang the Deil, and gart him zoul.”

\* As the following quotation appears rather of a verbose character, I have given only the substance of it above. “*Conjiciunt quidam in haec tempora (scilicet tempora quibus regnavit Eugenius Filius Fergusii 2di, qui obiit A. 262.) Finnannum filium Coëli, vulgo vocabulo Fyn-Mac-Coul; virum, uti ferunt, immani statura septenum enim cubitorum hominem fuisse narrant. Scotici sanguinis, venatoria arte insignem, omnibusque insolita corporis mole formidolosum: Circularibus fabulis, et iis quae de Arthuro Britonum rege, passim apud nostratus legantur similitimum, magis quam eruditorum testimonia decantatum.*—Boeth. Hist. Scot. 7, *ad finem*.

† Fingal, advancing, drew his sword; the blade of dark-brown Luno. The gleaming path of the steel winds through the gloomy ghost.—The spirit of Loda shrieked, as, rolled into himself, he rose on the winds.—CARRIC-THURA.

‘ In Colville’s Whigs’ Supplication, published 1664, he says—

“ One man, quoth he, oft times hath stood,  
And put to flight a multitude,  
Like Samson, Wallace and Sir Bewis  
And *Fyn MacCoul* beside the Lewis.”

‘ An edition of the Psalms of David, was published at Edinburgh in Gaelic anno 1684, by a learned clergyman—Kirk, minister of Balquhidder, in which the author addresses his book in some Gaelic verses, of which the following is a literal translation.

“ Little volume, go boldly forth,  
Raise whom you reach to pure and godly strains,  
*Hail the generous land of Fingal’s heroes,*  
The Highland tracts and Isles of the Hebrides.”

‘ Nicolson, in his Scottish Historical Library, written anno 1702, takes notice of an old Romance of the valour and feats of *Fyn M’Coul, a giant of prodigious stature*, in the days of King Ewain the Second.

‘ Colgan also, an Irish author of great learning and research, mentions *Fingal* (or Finnius filius Cubhalli) much celebrated in *poems* and *tales inter suos*.

‘ In Lindsay’s Satire of the three Estates, written in anno 1530, among the relicts produced by the Pardoner, is,

“ Heir is an relict lang and braid  
*Of Fyn MacCoul* the richt chaft blaid,  
With teeth and all togidder.”—AUCHINLECK M.S. \*

These extracts clearly prove that Fingal, Ossian, Oscar and Gaul, were well known in Ireland and the South of Scotland in the 12th, 13th, and 15th centuries; and the following will still more amply prove how very generally they were known in the Highlands before the days of Mr. Macpherson.

\* I am indebted to Sir John Sinclair’s Essay for the greater number of the foregoing quotations.

Though few pieces of poetry more beautiful than the "Aged Bard's Desire," from which the following verses are extracted, and of which a translation has been given in a previous page, exist in the Gaelic language, the name and the history of its author are lost in the darkness of former ages. It is enough for our present purpose, however, that it may be seen in Ronald Macdonald and Turner's Collections.

\* Bring forth my tuneful harp and flowing shell,  
And be they placed, all quietly, by my side,  
The shield that sav'd my sire through battle-swell,  
And oft roll'd back the war's terrific tide.

Then on the *harps of Ossian* and of *Daol*,  
Oh let me hear a sadly-pleasing sound,  
As opening wide is seen their airy hall—

When evening comes the bard will not be found !

In Ronald Macdonald's Collection may also be found a song, in the form of a dialogue between the hunter and the owl, which bears evidence of having been composed in the days of the first of the Keppoch family, even if tradition had been silent on many other interesting particulars regarding the history of Donul Maciunlaidh, its author, containing the following verses. The generations of the Keppoch family are nineteen.†

‡ All lone amid the dreary, darkening heath,  
The dusky lakes of Ranach I behold ;  
And Cruachan's crest sustains a cloudy wreath,  
Though ev'ning clothes Benvreak in mellowy gold.

\* Biodh cruit a's slige Ian ri m' thaobh,  
San sgiadhb dhion mo shìnnis sa chath.  
Sin fòsgladh talla Ossian's Dhaoil,  
Le fuaim cruit gu caoin a 's mall,  
Gus an trial mo cheo air gaoidh—  
Thig a feasgar's cha bhìdh 'm bard air bhrath !

† The poetic, expressive and concise character of the Gaelic language is such as to forbid a literal translation into English, for want of equivalent words, which renders circumlocution absolutely necessary to do justice to the original. These given here may be considered always free translations, but the meaning, particularly as regards the Poems of Ossian, is faithfully preserved, as the qualified reader may judge.

‡ Chi mi na *du-lochain uam*  
Chi mi chruach 's Bheinnbheac,  
Chi mi Strath *Ossian na Fian*,  
'S Chi mi ghrain air Meal-nan leac,

Towering to heaven, his head Bennevis shews,  
 Gazing o'er hills, and heaths and seas afar;  
 And *Ossian's straths* 'mid woods and wild repose  
 Deaf to the noise of *Fingal's* sylvan war.

In the same Collection will be found a Lament "on the death of Archibald Earl of Argyle, beheaded in 1685," which mentions Diarmaid and his father Duine as the ancestors of the Campbells. It will be recollected, that, according to the poems of Ossian, Diarmaid was the nephew of Fingal, and no one will doubt that the fame of that hero was well known in the Highlands at the period in which it was considered a panegyric on the Campbells to trace them to that source. I could give many extracts of other songs, composed in the sixteenth century, to the same effect, but I think it would be more than useless to do so.

† O many a lion hearted chief,  
 And warrior band,  
 Of *Diarmaid's* race, *famed Duine's* son,  
 Grace Scotia's land.  
 From *Diarmaid* came the *lordly* clan,  
*How old the race!*  
 None can be found more worthy praise,  
 In any place.

The following verse is from an Elegy on the death of Sir James Macdonald of Sleate by his brother Archibald. The original song will be found also in Ronald Macdonald's Collec-

Chi mi Beinnivis gu h-ard,  
 Agus an Carndearg ri bun,  
 'S ga be tharladh air a taobh,  
 Chite as monidh fhaoin a's muir.

† 'Sioma leoghan, a 's triath duineil,  
 As Ceann buidhne,  
 Don't *shliochd Iarlail sin Shliochd Dhiarmaid,*  
*Sar Mhac Duibhne.*  
 Bho *Dhiarmaid a thainaig sibh ulle*  
*Sean am finedh,*  
 Dream a b fhear a b fhiach a Mholadh,  
 Chualadh Sinne.

tion. He lived in the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries.

\* *Like Ossian, child of woe ! all sad and frail,  
I friendless mourn—no comfort I espy,  
Tears wet my pillow, morning hears my wail,  
And evening listens to my heavy sigh.*

In the same collection will be found an Elegy on the death of the celebrated Sir Ewen Cameron of Lochiel, of which the following is an extract. He was the most distinguished Highland chief in the days of Cromwell.

† Gay at the feast, a lion in the field,  
He shunn'd no battle, knew not how to yield;  
His deeds associate with his lofty name,  
*Fingalian glory and Fingalian fame.*

There is, in the same book, a song composed on the death of Iain Ciar of Lorn, the era of whom I cannot fix, but as "The Gathering of the Macdougals" is derived from him, ("Failte Iain Cheir,") I conclude that it may boast of considerable antiquity. The following is a verse of that song. The rest of it is particularly beautiful.

‡ *Like youthful Oscar amid Fingal's race,  
His form was graceful though his strength excell'd;  
The knave and traitor glancing at his face,  
Shrunk from his looks ere yet his words repell'd.*

The following extract from a song of Nighn Alastair Ruaidh to Sir Norman Macleod is from the same collection. She died before M'Pherson's translation appeared, as may be seen by.

\* *'S fhad tha mi 'm Ossian gun mheadhail,  
As do dheaghaidh bochd dolum.—  
Ma cheol laidhe a's eiridh,  
M' osnadh gheur air bhleg tabhachd.*

† *Leoghan fuileachdach, eachdach,  
Sundach, flaithasach, eibbinn,  
Bar na carraid cha d' eis du—  
'S du nach iaradh ratneute  
Cliu a 's onair na Feinne,  
Dhearbh a 's choisin u fein ann s gach ball iad.*

‡ *Bha e treunmhor le deagh choltas,  
Mar bha Oscar son Fheinn.—&c. &c.*

her epitaph in Alexander Macdonald's song book, published before then.

\* 'The feast succeeded, the hall loudly rung,  
And mirth flew swiftly round the social board;  
But all was silent when the harp was strung,  
*And the Sad Tales of Fingal's race were heard.*

It will be remarked, with surprise by the sceptic, that this last line, which is literally translated, 'actually describes the melancholy character of these poems; while another of the quotation declares that it was *customary* to introduce their *history* in such a manner.

The following verse is from a song, which will be found in the same Collection, to Donald Gorm Og of Sleate, by Jain Lom, Laureate to King James the Second.

† *Since the Fingalian race were gone*  
Thy sires were Chieftains of renown,  
Bright of lineage, bright of name,  
Leading clans to fields of fame.

The following extract is from a song in the same book, on the death of Alastair du of Glengarry, by Cicily, the daughter of Keppoch, who composed many songs on the state of the kingdom in the year 1715.

‡ *Had others been like Gaul* when on the tide,  
'Neath spreading wings the ship was launch'd to bound;  
From wind nor wave should shrink her sounding side,  
Till her bold keel the destined haven had found.

\* 'S tu bu tighearnail gabhail,  
Nuair a shuidheadh gach caraid mun' bhord—  
Gu 'm bidh farum air thailisg,  
Agus fuaim air a chlarsich.—  
*Se b' chleachdadh na dheighid, a' d' fhuair*  
*Greis air uirsgeal na Fcinne.—&c. &c.*

† *Bho na dhimich an Fheinn,*  
'S Chinnfhine sibh fein,  
Air finichin feill gu dearbh.

‡ *Na 'm b' ionan do do chach 's do Gholl,*  
Nuair dhimich an long fo beart,  
Cha d' fhosgail Caladh roidh sail,  
Gun fhuos cea fath thug i mach.



The song from which the following verse is derived, in Turner's Collection, is called, "Jain mac Jain mhic Aillain's Dream on the state of the Kingdom in the year 1715." It is a beautiful poem, but he has left many others superior to it.

\* Host after host—the force of sea and land—  
 Poured, thundering, onward to the echoing strand,  
 Provided with all stores for death and life,  
 Burning with fierce impatience for the strife.—  
*Since Fingal's days* no Highland eye has seen  
 So fine an army, so sublime a scene.

The song on the massacre of Glenco, from which the following verse is extracted, was composed by Macmathan, who lived at that time, as may be seen by the song itself. It will be found both in Ronald Macdonald and Turner's Collections.

† No leech had they their gaping wounds to close;  
 Faint, bleeding, shivering 'mid the drifting snows,  
 Were the gay band who loved to hear the song  
 That praised the kindly, courteous, bold and strong;  
 But had the foe that sought them from afar,  
*Given the fair combat—the Fingalian war ;*  
 Those shaggy birds that tear the Highland breast,  
 Had found in their's a more deserving feast.

I cannot fix the era of the individual who is the subject of the Lament in Turner's Collection of which the following is an

\* Nuar a chruinnich iad uille,  
 Sluagh mara a s' tire,  
 Bu lionar na mis gsan,  
 Amunisien a 's probhisien ;  
 Iad gu namhadach, fuileach,  
 Gu buintain gach chis dhiu,  
*Bho linn Fhinn* cha do chruinich,  
 An urad do mhiltin.

† Cha d fhuair sibb riamh leigh,  
 A leitheas na 'n creuchd gun bhi slan,  
 Cèll na fala fo n leintibh,  
 Bha na fir bu mhor feill ri luchd dhan,  
*Na be Camhrag na Feinne,*  
 A bhidh eader sibh fein 's air naimh  
 Bhidh eoin mhollach a n t shleibhe,  
 A gairsain salach air creubhagan chaich.

extract; but the song itself is by Mary Maclauchline, who composed songs to Sir John and Sir Hector Maclean of Mull, and evidently in their own time. The latter fell, with seven hundred of his clansmen, (the Macleans were not a retreating race) at the battle of Inverkeithing.

\* *Like Ossian, I am left to wail alone,  
My friends were numbered and the best are gone !*

Duncan Buidhe of the Songs, who lived at Loch-Awe side, and was an old man in the days of Prince Charles, as may be seen by a song of his in Turner's Collection, lamenting the deserted state of the neighbourhood and his inability to join himself also, says, in his song in praise of Cruach Narichin,

† Mountain of fame, on thy exalted side,  
Once Fingal's house arose in towering pride;  
Twelve were its spacious halls, and, in each hall,  
Twelve blazing fires threw splendour round the wall;  
And when the King was there with his high race,  
Making thy rocks re-echo to the chace,  
Tall, stout and strong, around each fire were seen,  
The martial figures of a hundred men.

In another humorous song, describing his journey in the pursuit of snuff, he compares the generous hospitality of his landlord to that of the Fingalians. This song may also be seen in Turner's Collection.

\* 'S mi mar Oissian nar diaidh,  
O'd riuneudh tagha na 'n corr airbh, &c. &c.

† Si d a chruach bha ainmel,  
'N tigh foirmeill bh' aig an Fheinn,  
Le 'n teogelach mor bha aincheartach,  
'S le Gillian meamnach trein;  
Bha dusan rum san talla ad,  
Ann 'sgach rum da aingeal dheug,  
'S be 'n cuntas 'n am an garaidh,  
Mu gach aingeal fear as ceud.

## SUMMARY OF AND REMARKS UPON THE FOREGOING EVIDENCE.

In the first pages of this Essay I have, with the assistance of the late Dr. Smith, endeavoured to give the reader an idea of the character of the Gaelic language, in answer to Dr. Johnson's first objection to the authenticity of these poems, namely that it is incapable of communicating the ideas ascribed to Ossian ; but no method can be imagined by which that objection could be incontrovertibly refuted *save by a reference to the originals now before the public* ; and to these, therefore, I appealed with such confidence as to have asserted *that no person capable of perusing them in the original can peruse them with pleasure in the translation*. This objection, then, is answered in the only manner in which it is capable of being answered ; and no one can, therefore, adhere to it whose decision is not founded on a perusal of the original, without the most ludicrous inconsistency.

The charge of barbarity involved in the foregoing objection is, in the opinion of most people, foreign to the subject ; but this is far from being the case. It may have been unhandsome in the Doctor to express this charge, but it must be granted that it naturally arose from the reflection that must have led to the objection in question. It is impossible even to imagine that the beautiful, the sublime, ideas of a Virgil or a Milton, can be happily communicated in the rude gibberish of a tribe of cannibals. To think clearly and to speak appropriately implies a cultivated language not less than a refined genius. The penetrating mind of Dr. Johnson could not but perceive this ; and to assert that the poems of Ossian were originally composed in Gaelic, appeared to him, therefore, equivalent to asserting that that language had been cultivated by grammarians and philosophers, and, consequently, those who spoke it were far from being a barbarous race. To prove that the Gaelic language had, in the days of Ossian, been a cultivated language, was, therefore, to prove that the Gael were not then a barbarous race. The idea given of that language appeared, therefore, a sufficient answer to this charge of barbarity ; but, from a wish to render the argument hence deduced as convincing as possible, I have attempted to shew, that the *result* of their collision with the power and discipline and generalship of the Romans, *proves* that they had

then been distinguished for patriotism, wisdom and bravery ; which is totally at variance with the characteristics of a barbarous state. I might go still farther. I might prove, from the construction of compound words in the Gaelic and the names of places in every part of Scotland, that those who formed these words and bestowed these names, were alive to the amiable ties of friendship and of love, and the refined emotions arising from all that is lovely and sublime in the landscape of their country ; or, in other words, that the Gael, *in former times*, were men who *conceived poetically and expressed themselves appropriately*. To enter at full into such a subject would swell this work beyond the bounds of a pamphlet, but two instances, which may substantiate the remark in a certain degree without encroaching greatly on the patience of the reader, may be given here, viz. :—*Gaol* and *shealladh-oibhneach* (corrupted *sheallach* of *minoch*.) The first is formed from the words *gath* (primitively a sun-beam) and *toil*, desire, i. e. the *sun-beam of desire*, or, in other words, a warm, bright or beaming desire. He who composed this word to convey an idea of love, it must be allowed *clearly conceived* and *appropriately expressed* the ardour and purity and beauty of that passion. I have assumed the second word because it is the name of a place in the South of Scotland, where the Gaelic has long ceased to be spoken, and this stamps its antiquity. It is pronounced *shealla oivnach*, and was naturally changed a little as the tongues of the inhabitants became less accustomed to the pronunciation of their native language. It is a singularly formed hill, which commands a view of the finer parts of Ayrshire, the Frith of Clyde, with all its islands, a great part of the Highlands, the North Channel, and the coast of Ireland. Were Sir Walter Scott standing on its summit he would be apt to give vent to the emotions of his heart by exclaiming,—“What a delightful view !” But, unfortunately for the originality of the expression, some rude barbarian, who “conceived grossly, and was contented to be grossly understood,” standing on the same spot, nobody knows how long since, felt and expressed the same *emotion* ! for *shealladh* signifies *view*, and *oibhneach*, *joyous* or *delightful* ; and this truly descriptive name was, by the *presumptuous savage*, given to the place. In short, there is no feature of our landscape capable of exciting an emotion to communicate which appropriately I could not produce a multitude of descriptive

names in the South and the North of Scotland. This says much. I question if any people could produce such convincing evidence of poetic minds and a cultivated language as the Gael might derive from these sources. Let him who doubts satisfy himself by proceeding on this principle, viz. an inquiry into the etymology of words in the Gaelic language and the names of places in every part of Scotland.

The Doctor's next objection—namely, that “no one has opportunities of hearing a composition often enough to learn it or inclination to repeat it often enough to retain it”—is triumphantly refuted by the fact, that from twenty to thirty volumes of Gaelic poetry now in print *have been so learned and retained in the Highlands*. As all that could be imagined against the authenticity of Ossian's poems has been founded on these two assertions, having answered these, I had done with the anti-Ossianists; but something yet remained to be said in justice to the memory of the father of Scottish poetry and the impartial lovers of ancient song. I have, therefore, clearly proved, on the evidence of twenty-eight impartial witnesses, beginning with Giraldus, who wrote in the 12th, and ending with Duncan Buidhe of the Songs, who composed in the beginning of the 17th century, that tales and poems ascribed to Ossian, and celebrating the character of Fingal, Oscar, Gaul, Diarmaid, &c. &c. were well known in Ireland and Scotland before the days of Mr. Macpherson. Every doubt, therefore, now remaining as to the authenticity of Ossian's poems, resolves itself into a single query, viz. :—Are the poems ascribed to Ossian a translation of those so extensively known in Ireland and Scotland before the days of Mr. Macpherson? This query is capable of being answered in two ways only. The first and most natural is this,—by producing the poems in the original. The second must be drawn from the essential qualities of the poetry in question. What, then, are the essential qualities of the poems ascribed to Ossian by Mr. Macpherson? Tenderness and sublimity—a degree of tenderness peculiarly calculated to engage the heart, and of sublimity peculiarly calculated to captivate the mind. Hector Boethius places the era of Fingal in the 4th century; others at a more early period. The poems of Ossian, then, known in Ireland and Scotland before the days of Mr. Macpherson, were composed in the 4th century if not sooner. What, then, it may

be asked, *must have been* the essential qualities of poetry *so calculated to engage the heart and captivate the mind as to have insured its own preservation, by oral recitation, from the 4th to the 17th century?* Tenderness and sublimity. The authorities above quoted clearly prove that the poems of Ossian had been so preserved in the Highlands to the beginning of the 17th century; and will any one, who deliberately reflects on this wonderful fact, still venture to assert that it consisted of mere scraps of the most fantastic and ludicrous character? The thing is impossible. The poetry which insured itself preservation, by oral recitation, from the 4th to the 17th century, *must have been peculiarly calculated to engage the heart and captivate the mind. It is, therefore, evident that the poems of Ossian, preserved in Ireland and Scotland from the 4th to the 17th century, were of the same character with these ascribed to him by Mr. Macpherson.* Again, what is the impression produced by the poems ascribed to Ossian by Mr. Macpherson as to the character of the heroes whose achievements they celebrate? Would the persecuted and distressed seek shelter under the shield of Fingal? Would the young hero, glowing with the love of country and of fame, exult in the very thought of being suffered to fight by his side? Would the lover of peace and sociality delight to feast at his table? In short, would one wish to pass his days in the society of such men as Fingal? The patriot, the philanthropist, and the hero may answer all these queries in the affirmative. What, then, was the impression produced by the poems of Ossian, preserved by oral recitation in Ireland and Scotland from the 4th to the 17th century, as to the character of the heroes whose achievements they celebrate? The Irish and the Scotch, forming their ideas of Fingal, Oscar, Gaul, &c., from the poems of Ossian, preserved among them by oral recitation from the 4th to the 17th century, *would not only wish to pass their days in such company, but even carried their enthusiasm so far as to have exulted in the hope of passing eternity in their society.* The poetry that not only ensured itself preservation for such a period and in such manner, but even produced an impression such as this on the hearts of the inhabitants of the two kingdoms, *must have been of a character that could not be surpassed by any thing ascribed to Ossian by Mr. Macpherson.* I have proved, on

the evidence of a mass of impartial witnesses, that the poems of Ossian had been preserved in Ireland and Scotland from the 4th to the 16th century, and, on the evidence of Giraldus, who wrote in the 12th century, and the aged bard who seems to have lived before then, that *such* was their impression on the hearts of the inhabitants of these countries. It is, therefore, evident that the poems ascribed to Ossian by Mr. Macpherson, and those known by that title before his time, were similar in their character and calculated to produce a similar impression.

Though no principle can be laid down from which a more correct estimate may be formed of the *character* of any kind of poetry than the *impression it is capable of producing*, and we have, *by this means*, ascertained the important fact, that the poems of Ossian preserved by oral recitation from the 4th to the 17th century, were the same, or what is equivalent to that, *not inferior* to those ascribed to him by Mr. Macpherson, yet, for the satisfaction of the reader, I will furnish additional evidence of this circumstance.

“Though it is well known,” observes the eloquent Johnston, “that the Scots had always more strength and industry to perform great deeds than care to have them published to the world, yet, in ancient times, they had and held in great esteem their own *Homers* and *Maros*, whom they named bards. These recited the *achievements of their brave warriors*, adapted to the musical notes of the harp; with these they roused the minds of those present *to the glory of virtue*, and transmitted patterns *of fortitude to posterity*” The only other author whom it is necessary to name, to render the above evidence conclusive, is Jerome Stone, who died in June 1756. He was a native of the county of Fife, where the Gaelic was by that time unknown; but, being appointed Rector to the School of Dunkeld, he resolved to study the language of the people among whom he lived. After he had acquired the Gaelic, he was surprised to find that a variety of “*literary works*” were preserved “*by oral tradition*” in that language, which seemed to him possessed of great merit. He proceeded to collect some of them, but a premature death (in the 30th year of his age) put an end to those attempts, after he had made some progress. His evidence of the preservation of such poems by oral recitation in Gaelic *previously to the translation by*

Macpherson, and his description of their character removes the strongest objection ever made to the authenticity of Ossian's poems, and completely establishes the foregoing hypothesis. He describes them as performances, "*which, for sublimity of language, nervousness of expression, and high-spirited metaphors, are hardly to be equalled among the chief productions of the most cultivated nations; whilst others of them breathe such tenderness and simplicity as must be greatly affecting to every mind in the least tinctured with the softest passions of pity and humanity.*"\*

If Ossian and his poems be not expressly alluded to in the first of these extracts, I know not who he means. He evidently describes some Highland bard *whom he compares to Homer*, or, in other words, *to the greatest Epic Poet the world has produced*, and the object and effect of whose works it was "*to celebrate the achievements of brave warriors, rouse the minds of his countrymen to the glory of virtue, and transmit patterns of fortitude to posterity.*" But this is not all. The other witness to this important fact describes the *particular features* of the poems of this Scottish Homer, as they existed and were rehearsed by *oral recitation* in the Highlands before the translation of Macpherson appeared. They were, he says, performances characterised by "*sublimity of language, nervousness of expression and high-spirited metaphors, and breathing such tenderness and simplicity as must be greatly affecting to every mind in the least tinctured by the softest passions of pity and humanity.*" †

\* For this and the preceding extract I am indebted to Sir John Sinclair. "*Quamvis intelligunt omnes plus semper virium et industriæ Scotis fuisse ad res gerendas, quam commentationis ad prædicandas habuerunt tamen antiquitus, et coluerunt suos Homeros et Maronis, quos Bardas nominabant. Hi fortium virorum facta versibus heroicis et lyre modulis optata concinebant; quibus et præsentium animas acuebant ad virtutis gloriam, et fortitudinis exempla ad posteris transmittabant. Cujusmodi apud Cambris et priscos Scotos nec dum desiere; et nomen illud patrio sermone adhuc retinent.*"—JOHNSTON.

† Did these extracts require confirmation in regard to the character they give of Gaelic poetry, we might refer to a work by Alexander Macdonald, schoolmaster in Ardnamorehan, printed at Edinburgh anno 1751.—The poems published in that volume are in Gaelic, but there is an English preface in which he assigns two reasons for publishing it; 1st. That it may



Will any man of candour and of genius say that Ossian and his poems are not here expressly named and characterised? I think not. The sceptic, however, has yet one loop-hole left through which he may draw his shaft at the bosom of the blind the venerable bard. He may say, "It is not Ossian and the poems ascribed to him that are here characterised. It is some other individual whose genius was only *similar* to that of Homer, and whose works are only *similar* to those ascribed to Ossian. You have by no means proved that the poet alluded to is your identical Ossian, and the poems alluded to his identical work." "In the Appendix to Dr. Blair's Essay on Ossian," observes Sir John Sinclair, "there is a respectable list of Clergymen and of Gentlemen *who declare that they had assisted Mr. Macpherson in collecting the poems*; that they had looked over his manuscripts *in both languages, while he was occupied in the translation*; that they had been accustomed to hear these poems repeated from their infancy; and that they themselves could REPEAT SEVERAL OF THEM. These are facts distinctly attested by one or more respectable characters, who allow Dr. Blair to give their names to the public. Nay more,—Five clergymen attest that they had taken the printed copy of Macpherson's translation in their hands while persons, whose names and places of abode they mention, repeated in the original the poems they had received from tradition; and that the translation and those agreed exactly except in a few variations, which must ever happen in oral tradition.

Besides this evidence from Blair's Dissertation, a variety of satisfactory proofs regarding the authenticity of particular parts, will be found in the Report of the Highland Society. *About fifteen hundred verses, in words almost the same with the poem of Fingal, were transmitted to that Society. It is thus proved that a great part of Fingal existed in oral tradition.*"

Four Clergymen have also attested that they have seen a manuscript of Ossian's poems, collected in Strathglass before the

raise a desire to know something of the Gaelic language, which, he states, contains in its bosom, the *charms of poetry and rhetoric*: and, 2d. To bespeak the favor of the public to a great collection of poems, in all kinds of poetry that have been in use among the most cultivated nations; "which surely includes epic poetry," observes Sir John Sinclair.

appearance of Macpherson's translation, at the College of Douay in Flanders—that they have heard the collector of these asserting *that his manuscript contained all the poems translated by Macpherson—that they have seen the translation compared to the originals contained in that manuscript ; and heard it frequently corrected and criticised in that manner.*

Is it necessary to say more? I think not. The identity of Ossian's poems is here proved on the most satisfactory evidence—on the evidence of a number of gentlemen whose veracity cannot be impeached—and who would be received as the most convincing evidence of any circumstance in the most august court of justice in Europe. But even this is not all. The Gaelic of these poems is now actually before the public, and bears on its face the genuine stamp of its own originality, and the most emphatic proof that Macpherson's is the translation. The address to the Sun in Carthon, and the poems of Darthula, Conlath and Cuthona, the address to Malvina in Croma, the Death of Oscar, Fingal's advice to Oscar, &c. &c. have all been transcribed from oral recitation and published in Gaelic *before* the publication of Macpherson's manuscripts, and there is not one passage of all these which is not capable of *proving that his English is the translation.*

After what has been proved, it were superfluous to draw any evidence from this source. I, therefore, insert the following translation of the current editions of the address to the sun in Carthon, more for the amusement of the reader than to confirm what has been said. Perhaps it would appear more satisfactory in a different form ; but the fact is, that I have always looked on it as a species of sacrilege to translate Gaelic poetry into English prose ; and I think the following as literal as it can be rendered with justice to the original.

Resplendent Orb that still dost move,  
Round as a warrior's shield, above,  
Whence thy unfrowning beams that shine  
Continually, thou light divine?  
Thou com'st in beauteous power array'd,  
The stars, retiring, hide their head,  
The moon retreats, with envy pale,  
Till western waves her orb conceal.

Thou rulest the glowing heavens alone,  
 Who dare approach thy splendid throne ?  
 Age melts the mountain-oak away,  
 The cairn and lofty cliff decay,  
 The mighty ocean ebbs and flows,  
 Wilder'd in heaven, the moon we lose,  
 But thou, victorious in thy might !  
 Mov'st joyous still in lasting light.  
 When lowering storms the world surround,  
 With darkness awful and profound ;  
 When dreadful thunder, bellowing, rolls,  
 Till earth is rocked and rent the poles ;  
 When lightning fierce, with flashes dire,  
 Darts, through the gloom, terrific fire ;  
 Fair 'mid the tumult shines thy form,  
 Thy pleasing smiles dissolve the storm !  
 But, ah, to me thou shin'st in vain,  
 I'll ne'er behold thy smiles again,  
 When eastern clouds, beneath thee roll'd,  
 Are rob'd in locks of glittering gold,  
 Nor when thou tremblest in the west,  
 Entering thy dusky gates of rest.  
 But thou, like me, though mighty now,  
 May'st also frail and aged grow,  
 Our years, descending from the sky,  
 Together to their end may fly,  
 Then thou shalt slumber in thine hall,  
 Regardless of the morning's call.  
 Be joyous, therefore, thou, O sun,  
 Ere yet thy mighty youth be gone,  
 Unlovely is old age—and sad  
 As the vain moon, that strives to wade  
 Through dusky clouds on plains to shine  
 When gloomy mists on mountains reign—  
 The feeble breeze that sighs expiring,  
 The wounded faint and slow retiring.

I have now, I think, clearly PROVED, THAT THE ORIGINALS  
 OF THE POEMS ASCRIBED TO OSSIAN BY MR. MACPHERSON HAD  
 BEEN PRESERVED BY ORAL RECITATION, FROM THE 4TH TO THE  
 17TH CENTURY, AND THAT THE CHARACTERS OF THE HEROES  
 WHOSE ACHIEVEMENTS THEY CELEBRATED WERE, CONSEQUENTLY,  
 WELL KNOWN IN THE HIGHLANDS, LOWLANDS AND IRELAND,  
 BEFORE THE APPEARANCE OF HIS TRANSLATION.

It cannot, therefore, be wondered at that any doubts as to the authenticity of these poems were heard in Scotland with surprise and indignation. At the same time it must be granted that the preservation of such poems by oral recitation for so many ages, was a circumstance naturally calculated to give rise to doubts on the part of a people so very different from the Scotch, in character, customs and pursuits—a people, too, never famed for putting the most favourable construction on the pretensions of their neighbours, and whose prejudices were at that moment all in arms against them. The ostentatious claims of the Gael, and the mysterious conduct of Macpherson himself, were also well-calculated to confirm these doubts and convert them into scepticism. The Gael were not contented to claim Ossian as the first of bards, but also Fingal as the first of heroes. They clung equally tenaciously to the ideas that “Fingal fought and that Ossian sung.” They insist that Ossian was the first of bards, and yet make no allowance for his invention or imagination, maintaining that all his dreams were a reality! Like the Author of Waverley, his theme may have been traditional and even witnessed facts, but a variety of his incidents are clearly the creation of his muse. This is evident from the names of the heroes, which almost always arise from their character or the adventures related of them. \*Fingal or Fionn-ghael means the fair, mild Gael; Oscar or Oscarradh, tall and fierce; Cuthona or Guth-thonnadh, the voice of waves; Malvina or Malladh-mhin,† mild of brow, &c. &c.—all of them poetic names evidently bestowed by the bard. The mysterious conduct of Macpherson was also well calculated to give rise to scepticism; but this admits of an easy solution on comparing the original with his translation. His knowledge of the Gaelic seems to have been extremely superficial, and he was not, perhaps, void of poetic vanity. Consequently his translation is frequently defective and often unfaithful. Any one who possesses a copy of the first edition of his work, by examining his translation of the names,

---

\* These being poetic appellations, evidently bestowed by the bard, I think it very probable, as observed in a previous note, that the Galgacus of Tacitus is the identical individual celebrated under the name of Fingal, in the poems of Ossian, and the traditions of Scotland and Ireland.

† *Mh* is pronounced like *v*.

which is frequently given in notes, may satisfy himself of this fact. *Had he, therefore, given the originals to the public, he might apprehend that he would soon find himself severely criticised as a translator, an event to be avoided equally by his love of profit and of fame.* But so much are we indebted to Mr. Macpherson for the preservation of these poems that to dwell on a supposition calculated to detract from his character seems the very essence of ingratitude. I revere his memory, and shall be silent on this subject. I cannot, however, but express my regret that the Highland Society of London has not given to the public a more faithful translation of these poems, which seems to be promised in their name by Sir John Sinclair in his admirable work on their authenticity. At the same time, I am perfectly aware that it must be a matter of difficulty with the Highland Society to find an individual capable of doing full justice to Ossian in a translation. Though many illustrious names grace the list of English poets, it may, without presumption, be doubted, whether any other among them could do Homer the same justice as Mr. Pope? But how much more difficult must it be to find, in so small a population as that of the Highlands, a translator capable of doing justice to Ossian, whose language is neither written nor taught?

MACPHERSON NO PLAGIARIST—HIS TRANSLATION BEAUTIFUL  
EVEN WHERE UNFAITHFUL.

I intended to have concluded my remarks here, but, having proceeded so far (I may say unintentionally, for I meant to have confined myself to the objections of Doctor Johnson) it may, perhaps, be expected that I should make a few observations on the most singular part of this singular controversy—I mean the charge of plagiarism brought against the Translator of these poems. Not contented to refuse the Gael credit for an ancient bard capable of composing them, the anti-Ossianists deny that the Highlands could produce a modern equal to that task, and assert that they are the mere result of plagiarism. I do not deny that Mr. Macpherson has, in many instances, sprinkled his translation with ideas apparently foreign to Ossian; but, in my opinion, every translator, possessing that enthusiasm in the behalf of his original necessary to enable him to do it full justice,

must have felt the temptation, sometimes to an irresistible degree, of giving a finish to a beautiful thought abruptly or defectively conveyed, or which excited a conception of it in his own mind it seemed too imperfectly communicated to give rise to in that of the general reader; and this natural impulse may be sometimes carried to an extent unjustifiable in the eyes of a strict critic by a person of quick feelings and of a vivid imagination. I do not, therefore, know to what extent Mr. Macpherson, as a translator, may be peculiarly condemned in this respect. Every question on the subject is interesting, and deserves to be criticised with some degree of liberality. Different ideas excite a different degree of conception in different minds, and, translated by different individuals, must be communicated strongly or weakly according to the impression made by the original. The greater part of Ossian's poems are most beautifully translated by Mr. Macpherson, though some of the ideas seem to have been very imperfectly conceived, others not understood, and consequently mis-translated or slipped over altogether. Judging from the former, however, this must be ascribed in a great measure to his superficial knowledge of the Gaelic language.

Had it been otherwise, and had he come to those years at which an improved judgment and taste generally suppress a pomposity of style almost always aimed at by young poets, ere he had commenced his translation, I am fully of opinion that no individual can or could exist in any age capable, on the whole, of doing more justice to Ossian in an English translation than Mr. James Macpherson. The following extracts, literally translated from the poem of Darthula, as transcribed from oral recitation by the Messrs. Stewart, and published in their collection of Gaelic poetry, may, perhaps, serve to give the reader an idea of the character of Mr. Macpherson's translation:—

MR. MACPHERSON'S TRANSLATION.

“But the land of the stranger saw thee lovely! thou wast lovely in the eyes of Darthula. Thy face was like the light of the morning. Thy hair like the raven's wing. Thy soul was generous and mild, like the hour of the setting sun. Thy words were the gale of the reeds; the gliding stream of Lora! But, when the rage of battle rose, thou wast a sea in a storm. The clang of thy arms was terrible. The host vanished at the sound of thy course.”

## LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

To Darthula delightful the yomth,  
 His face was like the smile of the *day*  
 His hair like the *colour* of the raven,  
*His cheek like the glow of the rasp,*  
*His bosom like the foam of the stream,*  
*Like smooth-flowing waters his voice,*  
 His heart was generous and daring,  
*Yet bright and mild as the sun ;*  
 But, when the pride of his *soul* arose,  
 He was *fierce* as the raging ocean ;  
*The strength and the sound of whose waves*  
*Were resembled by the strokes of his steel.*

## MR. MACPHERSON'S TRANSLATION.

“ ‘ Lovely art thou, O stranger !’ she said, for her trembling soul arose.  
 ‘ Fair art thou in thy battles, friend of the fallen Cormac ! Why dost  
 thou rush on in thy valour, youth of the ruddy look ? Few are thy  
 hands in fight against the dark-brown Cairbar ! O that I might be freed  
 from his love, that I might rejoice in the presence of Nathos ! Blest are  
 the rocks of Etha ! They will behold his steps at the chace ; they will  
 see his white bosom when the winds lift his flowing hair !”

## LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

“ How pleasing,” *said the mildest maid,*  
 “ The stranger from the battle of wounds !  
*Though painful to the heart of his mother*  
*His daring course in the breast of the strife !*  
*How blest the maid of his love,*  
*In Albyn, happy land of boughs !*  
*When she beholds, on the steed of the waves,*  
*Hurrying for the haven, the hero !”*

## MR MACPHERSON'S TRANSLATION.

“ He returned ; but his face was dark. He had seen his departed  
 friend ! It was the wall of Tura. The ghost of Cathullin stalked there  
 alone : the sigh of his breast was frequent. The decayed flame of his  
 eye was terrible ! His spear was a column of mist. The stars looked  
 dim through his \* form ! His voice was like hollow wind in a cave :

---

\* “ The stars dim-twinkled through his form.” See Connal's description  
 of Crugal's ghost in the first book of Fingal. One of Mr. Macpherson's  
 chief errors, as a translator, seems to have arisen from his over-anxiety to  
 make every passage sound and glitter. For this purpose, the colouring of

His eye a light seen afar. He told the tale of grief. The soul of Nathos was sad, like the sun in the day of mist, when his face is watery and dim."

LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

She saw, *bending towards her,*  
Nathos, but his face was dark,  
He had seen *the semblance of Cuthullin,*  
*High on the breast of the tower !*  
*Solemnly stalked the ghost in his grief,*  
Many were the sighs of his bosom.  
His eye *was faint as a clouded flame,*  
*His spear as a wreath of mist behind his shield,*  
And, like hollow wind in a *clefty cave,*  
*There was wailing and woe in his voice !*  
Sad was the soul of Nathos *hearing*  
*The tale of his death from the shade !*

MR. MACPHERSON'S TRANSLATION.

" 'Why art thou sad, O Nathos,' said the lovely daughter of Colla. 'Thou art a pillar of light to Darthula. The joy of her eyes is in Etha's chief. Where is my friend but Nathos? My father, my brother, is fallen ! Silence dwells on Selama. Sadness on the blue streams of my land. My friends have fallen with Cormac. The mighty were slain in the battles of Erin.' "

LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

" *Why sinks thy bosom in grief,*  
*Nathos of many charms ?*  
Said the daughter of Colla *sadly.*  
" *None lives to Darthula save Nathos,*  
*' Neath the broad flat stone are her friends !*  
I have nor father nor brother,  
*And without pity is my oppressor !*  
*The plains of Selama grow dark,*  
*Its green-sided mountains grow bare,*  
*The trouts spring not against its streams,*  
*Its larks and thrushes are mute !*

every line was, if possible, heightened, and the similes of one poem eternally transferred to another. This has occasioned innumerable repetitions, and frequently thrown an air of pomposity over the elegant simplicity of Ossian's ideas. The error, however, is peculiar to the age at which he wrote, for almost all young poets require to cure themselves of this failing. He was only twenty-two years of age when his first translation was completed.



*Nor wonder ! since gone is fair Trathal,  
My brother that surpassed the people,  
And they have laid Colla the kindly,  
My beloved father, beneath the turf."*

These extracts, literally translated, on being compared to those of Mr. Macpherson, may serve to give the reader an idea of the character of his edition of Ossian's poems, as regards the original. It may be seen from these that he is blamed by the friends and the enemies of Ossian often unfairly and always illiberally. In nine instances out of ten in which he has departed from the original, he has shewn himself possessed of no ordinary share of the fire and tenderness of Ossian. \*

---

\* The following short specimen may perhaps be sufficient to exemplify to the reader the spirit in which Mr. Macpherson's translation is criticised by some of his friends :—

DR. ROSS *VERSUS* CESAROTTI.

"The translation of Macpherson is a mass of absolute confusion, unlike to any thing in the compass of nature. The hair is mist; that mist one while curls on a hill, and again shines to a beam of the west.

"Thy hair is like the mist of Cromla  
When it curls on the hill;  
When it shines to the beam of the west."—DR. ROSS.

"Who could ever have imagined that mist could afford such an elegant comparison? It is a pity that it should in some measure be disgraced, by coming from the mouth of such a brutal character as Duchomar. Ossian could not certainly have pitched upon any thing more beautiful, refined, and appropriate, to represent, with a single object, a head of hair, smooth, flaxen, curled, and flowing, all at the same instant. Here, then, is one of those singular beauties which in vain we look for in Homer.—CESAROTTI."

MACPHERSON'S TRANSLATION.

"She came, in all her tears she came;  
She drew the sword from his breast.  
He pierced her white side!  
He spread her fair locks on the ground!"

NEW TRANSLATION BY DR. ROSS.

"Tearful and slow she came,  
To draw the sword from his side.  
He pierced the fair breast of the maid.  
She fell; her locks were spread on the ground."

Here the translator, hardly ever faithful to his original, departs entirely from the sense of the Gaelic poem, and *disgusts* his readers with the *indigested*

It is proper to observe here, however, that the poem of Darthula was not found among those left by Mr. Macpherson for publication, and to defray the expenses of which he bequeathed a thousand pounds by his will. But this should have no influence on the decision of the reader as regards the object of these extracts. Though a number of spurious lines will be found in the poems of Ossian, as handed down by oral recitation, the genuine passages never disagree, and these, as they always indicate a coarseness of taste and imbecility of genius totally unequal to the production of the ideas on either side of them in the same poem, are easily detected, and, of course, as readily rejected by the translator. In the edition of the poem of Darthula, published by the Messrs. Stewart, the following lines will be found, with many others equally ludicrous. Darthula relates a dream to Nathos, from which she forebodes the death of the brothers by the hand of Cairbar, on which he exclaims,—

By stones and by trees !

By the ducks of the ponds !

and *absurd extravagancies of his own confused imagination*. He tells us, that Morna, who stabbed Duchomor, came afterwards, at his request, and drew the sword from his breast ; upon which, though the sword was in the hands of Morna, he adds, that Duchomor pierced her white side without a weapon, and then took the trouble to spread her fair locks on the ground. What a contrast to the simple tale of the poet of nature ! It tells us that Morna approached Duchomor to draw the sword from his side ; but that, *as soon as she came within the reach of his arm, he seized her by the breast, and, by a last desperate effort of expiring nature, drew the sword from his own side and plunged it into her heart*. He adds, in all the simplicity of nature, ‘ She fell ; her white locks were spread on the ground.’—Da. Ross.

“ No poet can be compared to Ossian in tragical narrations. He possesses all the requisites to surprise and awaken the mind. He at first interests the heart by the most moving strains :—as soon as he is in possession of it, he vehemently hurries our feelings towards the catastrophe, without giving us time to perceive how or in what manner it is effected. Moreover, he often omits some circumstance that might develope the fact, but which in so doing would diminish its force. For, in the present instance, we cannot conceive clearly the manner in which Duchomor wounds Morna. But Ossian appears to be too well acquainted with the secret strokes of art to care much about such nice discriminations. The thunderbolt bursts, stuns, dazzles, and leaves behind it a gloom that completes the horror of the scene.—CESAROTTI.”

By the whelps of the wolves !  
 By the sloping tails of the foxes !  
 What will bring us near the hero !

The reader, I imagine, can have no difficulty in deciding that these lines and the preceding extracts had not been composed by the same individual. The following, which, however, will not be found in Mr. Macpherson's translation, comes, almost, at the heels of these contemptible lines, in the same edition of this poem :—

Delightful is that land, that distant land !  
 Albyn and Cona of the pools !  
 Oh that I were beside it—  
 That I were beside it with Nathos !  
 Then bear to Albyn my love,  
 Whence well is seen, and afar,  
 Glens and mountains, heaths and wilds,  
 Oceans wide, gulfs, lakes and plains !  
 No wonder my love has been given  
 To Albyn of noblest heroes,  
 Fair is my love, and of them  
 Nathos the kind and the daring !

Before concluding these remarks, I may, perhaps, with some propriety, endeavour to explain how Mr. Macpherson may have, unconsciously, heightened ideas, in the original but very faintly analogous to some of those of the greater poets of antiquity, into so strong a resemblance (see Dr. Ross's translation of Fingal in Sir John Sinclair's Essay already alluded to) as to give them an air of plagiarism.

At the time of commencing his translation, Mr. Macpherson may be said to have been but a mere school-boy, and, like most school-boys of a poetic cast, the volatile vivacity of his imagination seems to have prevented the classification (as it may perhaps be termed) in his mind of all his literary knowledge. On the contrary, the fairy warp and woof, untwined by his genius from the golden looms of antiquity, seem to have been thus suffered to blend themselves together in his mind, and to mingle, imperceptibly, with the genial train of thought that occupied his youthful imagination. The dull-souled critic, whose plodding

judgment was never warped from his methodical course by the wandering joys of a dreaming fancy, will neither understand nor allow this. But, show me the poet worthy of the name, who, on being convicted of plagiarism by the invidious reviewer, has not felt that he had thus, unconsciously, given the thought of another for his own; for how else can he account for it? I am far from asserting that every unconscious similarity of thought can be ascribed to this source. On the contrary, I cannot conceive how two men of genius can write on the same subject without getting, in a certain degree, into a similar train of thought. But to one or other of these may, I am convinced, be ascribed every instance of supposed plagiarism, pointed out in such works as indicate an *uniformity* of superior powers of mind. No plagiarist (I affirm without the fear of rational contradiction) can produce a new work of a *connected, uniform character*. A number of the ideas may be borrowed, but the detail must be differently supplied, and he who would steal his vivid passages from Homer and keep up the interest of his work, that is to say, keep his ideas and conceptions from sinking when he departed from Homer, would require to be as great a genius as Homer himself; and no one can imagine that a soul such as this could stoop to plagiarism. A connected, uniform work cannot, therefore, be produced by the mere plagiarist, and no one can deny that the poems of Ossian are of this description. Nay, some of the episodes and other passages, which none could ever attempt to ascribe to plagiarism, are, perhaps, the most beautiful, the most poetic, parts of these poems. In this respect, also, those poems of Ossian, transcribed by others from oral recitation, bear the same character with those ascribed to him by Mr. Macpherson. The address to Malvina, for instance, in "Losga Tura," or the burning of Tura, as published by Dr. Smith, bears a resemblance so striking to the strain in which she is often addressed in Mr. Macpherson's Ossian, that no unprejudiced person can doubt their having been composed by the same individual. At all events, it must be granted that he who composed that address, and indeed the whole poem, must have been abundantly equal to the task of composing any passage in Mr. Macpherson's Ossian. I have attempted a translation of this passage, and also of that at the beginning of the poem of Croma (assuming, however, what appears to me to be a more natural

arrangement of the verses than that transcribed from oral recitation and adopted by Mr. Macpherson) that the reader may be enabled to form some idea of the accuracy of this observation. I am, at the same time, perfectly sensible that the similarity must appear much more striking to him who peruses both in the original, the stile and the air of which (if I may so speak) cannot be imitated or preserved in any translation. Indeed, so striking is the resemblance in Gaelic, that the one might be given as a continuation of the other.

FROM THE POEM OF CROMA TRANSLATED BY MR. MACPHERSON.

It was ! it was ! my Oscar's voice that stole—  
 Ah seldom heard !—so softly on my soul !  
 For I beheld the spirit of my love,  
 Inclining, all majestic, from above,  
 Dress'd in a flowing robe, whose airy fold  
 Shone more refulgent than the stranger's gold !  
 Why, from thy darkly-winding course, O stream,  
 Came yon swift blast to break Malvina's dream ?  
 Its wing resounded in the leafy shade,  
 And all of Oscar left to me is fled !  
 I feel my anxious heart beat quick and high,  
 And my fond hopes are wing'd to seek the sky !  
 Then, open wide your airy halls above,  
 Keen-sworded fathers of my faithful love,  
 The welcome warning Oscar's spirit gave,  
 And my steps quicken to the peaceful grave !

It was ! it was my Oscar's voice that stole—

Ah seldom heard !—so softly on my soul !

Like a young tree whose blooming boughs inspire  
 The pleasing wood-notes of the warbling choir,  
 My beauty flourished while my Oscar's eye  
 Fondly beheld and kindled into joy.  
 But, when the dismal tidings of his death  
 Came, like a blast along the desert heath,  
 It swept my youthful comeliness away,  
 I sunk to earth and yielded to decay.  
 The pleasing spring, with all her train of flowers,  
 Smil'd on our plains, soft shedding balmy showers,  
 Our vales rejoiced, our groves still owned her reign,  
 But I, alas ! have never bloom'd again !

The virgins see me silent in the hall,  
 And kindly strive, by pleasing, to recall  
 My bosom's peace. They strike the trembling string,  
 Malvina's woe and Oscar's beauty sing.  
 "Ah, why so lorn, so lonely dost thou seem,  
 Thou mildest maid of Lutha's flowing stream?  
 Was his face lovely as the sun's first ray,  
 Rising 'mid golden locks to shed the day?"  
 Though sweet your song, ye maids, 'tis sung in vain,  
 My tears flow softer, but my griefs remain,—  
 For in my soul thy dwelling still is warm,  
 Illustrious son of Ossian strong of arm!

ADDRESS TO MALVINA IN "LOSGA TURA," AS TRANSCRIBED FROM  
 ORAL RECITATION BY DR. SMITH.

What melting voice pours forth the notes of woe,  
 That on the breath of night, so sadly flow?  
 That faintly steals upon my listening ears,  
 All fondly mingling praise with sighs and tears?  
 Pour, nightly phantom, pour thy pleasing voice,  
 I shall incline to listen and rejoice;  
 I'll bend, with forward ear, 'mid locks of gray,  
 To hear thy name, thy tale, and doleful lay.  
 The plaintive notes come growing on the sky,  
 Like the cleaved torrent-sound of mountains high,  
 When, rising from two gulfs in mist and foam,  
 It climbs the hill and calls the hunter home.  
 "Sweet is thy sound O Lora," then he cries,  
 As in his lonely booth is heard the noise—  
 "Sweet is thy sound far-floating on the gale,  
 While, with resistless steps, thou runn'st along the vale."  
 Yes, lonely hunter of the desert wild!  
 Her noise, afar, at eve is soft and mild:  
 But, ah, more sweet, more pleasing to the ear,  
 The melting voice of cherished woe I hear.  
 'Tis like the airs the bards breathe on the gale,  
 In the lone bosom of a silent vale,  
 Where, all unseen, the limpid streamlets rove,  
 With plaintive murmurs thro' the shadowy grove,  
 Or, like the pleasing song of Oscar's love,  
 When he inclines to listen from above,  
 And all is hushed, till e'en the thistle's beard,  
 Falling on earth, by list'ning ears is heard.—  
 It is my son! it is thy mournful love,—  
 The lonely thrush of the deserted grove.

Daughter of Toscar !—lonely child of woe !  
 Ah ! what avail thy tears that ceaseless flow !—  
 The soul of Ossian sees no ray of light,  
 Save when thy voice comes, beaming, on its night !  
 Then pour thy softly-pleasing voice along,  
 And strike the harp to wake my soul to song.—  
 Like the still sound that steals upon the ear,  
 When on the mist of noon we think we hear  
 A spirit's harp, ascends her voice of love,  
 The lethargy of Ossian to remove !  
 Slowly on mine own soul,  
 The years that are past return !

Though the foregoing (at least in the original) appears to me convincing, I cannot resist the temptation of giving another extract from this poem :—

Lithama's house rose on a winding dale  
 In the green bosom of a lonely vale,  
 Sheltered by mountains wild and hoary wood,  
 And its grey towers were figured in the flood  
 Of a broad stream, that, winding proudly by,  
 Rush'd down the glen and sought the sea with joy.  
 Lithama's drink was of the limpid stream,  
 Lithama's food of his own mountain-game,  
 He ask'd no more ; but still his flaming blade  
 Wav'd round the unprotected orphan's head  
 To ward off foes : he sought nor shunn'd the field ;  
 Yet the distress'd found shelter 'neath his shield.  
 The stately oak full fifty times had shed  
 The blooming honours of his tow'ring head,  
 While to his friends the mild Lithama said,  
 Lo ! how our time decays, our friends decay'd ?  
 Like leaves on trees, like grass on mountains high,  
 They grow, they bloom, they wither and they die !  
 Some bloom and wither like the tender rose,  
 Others their silent, short existence close  
 Like summer-leaves ; some, like my love, again,  
 Drop their ripe heads on autumn's bounteous plain :  
 Some, like Lithama, sadly, slowly fade,  
 When winter strips the honours of their head.  
 Our days are like the seasons of the year,  
 They dance their turn, and, dancing, disappear  
 Quick as a sun-beam darted on a vale  
 Where darkness gathers, coming tempests wail !

Then, since our fleeting life thus quick decays,  
 Seize, seize on fame and live in lofty lays!—  
 Not on that fame which scowls like coming night,  
 When storms and tempests crown the mountain's height;  
 But on such fame, as, living long and bright,  
 On after ages sheds a stream of light.

The rest of this poem is in no respect inferior to the preceding. It is, in short, evident that this poem and Mr. Macpherson's *Ossian* have been composed by the same individual—an individual whose lays, whether published in the Gaelic of Dr. Smith or the English of Mr. Macpherson, breathe the same melancholy air, and indicate the same soft, pathetic and sublime touches by which the master-hand of inimitable genius must ever be distinguished. This is very different from the work of the plagiarist. His best passages must ever be such as he borrows. Hence his work can exhibit nothing but a succession of the low and the high—now rising to Homer and *Ossian*—now sinking to Macflecknoe and Bays. Let him who would form a correct idea of the character of the plagiarist's work consult Mr. Dryden and Mr. Pope. He who does so will not subscribe to the opinion of those, who, conceiving Mr. Macpherson to be the author of *Ossian's* poems, call him a mere plagiarist.

That which must ever constitute the character of the plagiarist's work is well painted in these lines, with which, therefore, I shall conclude this essay—

“ When did his muse from Fletcher scenes purloin,  
 As thou whole *Ethridge* dost transfuse to thine?  
 But so transfused, as oil and waters flow,  
*His always floats above, THINE sinks below.*”

DRYDEN.











